

COURSE OF LECTURES,
Dramatic,
ART AND LITERATURE,

BY
AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL,

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL GERMAN

JOHN BLACK,



IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PREFACE OF THE TRANSLATOR.

THE Lectures of A. W. SCHLEGEL on Dramatic Poetry have obtained high celebrity on the Continent, and been much attended to of late in several publications in this country. The boldness of his attacks on rules which are considered as sacred by the French critics, and on works of which the French nation in general have long been proud, called forth a more than ordinary degree of indignation against his work in France. It was amusing enough to observe the hostility carried on against him in the Parisian Journals. The writers in these Journals found it much easier to condemn M. SCHLEGEL than to refute him : they allowed that what he said was very ingenious, and had a great appearance of truth ; but still they said it was not truth. They never however, as far as I could observe, thought proper to grapple with him, to point out any thing unfounded in his premises, or illogical in the conclusions which he drew from them : they generally confined themselves to mere

assertions, or to minute and unimportant observations by which the real question was in no manner affected.

In this country the work will no doubt meet with a very different reception. Here we have no want of scholars to appreciate the value of his views of the ancient drama; and it will be no disadvantage to him, in our eyes, that he has been unsparing in his attack on the literature of our enemies. It will hardly fail to astonish us, however, to find a stranger better acquainted with the brightest poetical ornament of this country than any of ourselves; and that the admiration of the English nation for Shakspeare should first obtain a truly enlightened interpreter in a critic of Germany.

It is not for me, however, to enlarge on the merits of a work which has already obtained so high a reputation. I shall better consult my own advantage in giving a short extract from the animated account of M. SCHLEGEL's Lectures in the late work on Germany by Madame de Stael:—

“ W. SCHLEGEL has given a course of Dramatic Literature at Vienna, which comprises every thing remarkable that has been composed for the theatre from the time of the Grecians to our own days: it

is not a barren nomenclature of the works of the various authors; he seizes the spirit of their different sorts of literature with all the imagination of a poet. We are sensible that to produce such consequences extraordinary studies are required: but learning is not perceived in this work, except by his perfect knowledge of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of composition. In a few pages we reap the fruit of the labour of a whole life; every opinion formed by the author, every epithet given to the writers of whom he speaks, is beautiful and just, concise and animated. He has found the art of treating the finest pieces of poetry as so many wonders of nature, and of painting them in lively colours which do not injure the justness of the outline; for we cannot repeat too often, that imagination, far from being an enemy to truth, brings it forward more than any other faculty of the mind; and all those who depend upon it as an excuse for indefinite terms or exaggerated expressions, are at least as destitute of poetry as of good sense.

“ An analysis of the principles on which both tragedy and comedy are founded, is treated in this course with much depth of philosophy: this kind of merit is often found among the German writers; but SCHLEGEL has no equal in the art of inspiring his own admiration; in general, he shows himself

attached to a simple taste, sometimes bordering on rusticity : but he deviates from his usual opinions in favour of the inhabitants of the south. Their play on words is not the object of his censure ; he detests the affectation which owes its existence to the spirit of society : but that which is excited by the luxury of imagination pleases him, in poetry, as the profusion of colours and perfumes would do in nature. SCHLEGEL, after having acquired a great reputation by his translation of Shakspeare, became also enamoured of Calderon, but with a very different sort of attachment from that with which Shakspeare had inspired him ; for while the English author is deep and gloomy in his knowledge of the human heart, the Spanish poet gives himself up with pleasure and delight to the beauty of life, to the sincerity of faith, and to all the brilliancy of those virtues which derive their colouring from the sun-shine of the soul.

“I was at Vienna when W. SCHLEGEL gave his public course of Lectures. I expected only good sense and instruction where the object was merely to convey information : I was astonished to hear a critic as eloquent as an orator, and who, far from falling upon defects, which are the eternal food of mean and little jealousy, sought only the means of ~~winning~~ a creative genius.”

Thus far Mad. de Stael.—In taking upon me to become the interpreter of a work of this description to my countrymen, I am aware that I have incurred no slight degree of responsibility. How I have executed my task it is not for me to speak, but for the reader to judge. This much however I will say,—that I have always endeavoured to discover the true meaning of the author, and that I believe I have seldom mistaken it. Those who are best acquainted with the psychological riches of the German language will be the most disposed to look on my labour with an eye of indulgence.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

FROM the size of the present work, it will not be expected that it should contain either a course of dramatic literature bibliographically complete, or a history of the theatre compiled with antiquarian accuracy. Of books containing dry accounts and lists of names there are already enough. My purpose was to give a general view, and to develop those ideas which ought to guide us in our estimate of the value of the dramatic productions of various ages and nations.

The greatest part of the following Lectures, with the exception of a few observations of a secondary nature, the suggestion of the moment, were delivered orally as they now appear in print. The only alteration consists in a more commodious distribution, and here and there in additions, where the limits of the time prevented me from handling many matters with uniform minuteness. This may afford a compensation for the animation of oral delivery which sometimes throws a veil over deficiencies of expression, and always excites a certain degree of expectation.

I delivered these Lectures, in the spring of 1808, at Vienna, to a brilliant audience of nearly three hundred individuals of both sexes. The inhabitants of Vienna have long been in the habit of rejecting the injurious descriptions which many writers of the North of Germany have given of that capital, by the kindest reception of all learned men and artists belonging to those regions, and by the most disinterested warmth for the renown of our literature, a warmth which a just sensibility has not been able to cool. I found here the cordiality of better times united with that amiable animation of the South, which is often denied to German seriousness, and the universal diffusion of a keen taste for intellectual entertainment. To this circumstance alone I must attribute it that not a few of the men who hold the most important places at court, in the state, and in the army, artists and literary men of merit, women of the choicest social cultivation, not merely paid me an occasional visit, but devoted to me an uninterrupted attention.

With joy I seize this fresh opportunity of laying my gratitude at the feet of the benignant monarch who, in the permission to deliver these Lectures communicated to me by way of distinction immediately from his own hand, gave me an honourable testimony of his gracious confidence, which I, as a foreigner who had not the happiness to be born under his sceptre, and merely felt myself bound as

a German and a citizen of the world to wish him every blessing and prosperity, could not possibly have merited.

Many enlightened patrons and zealous promoters of every thing good and becoming have merited my gratitude for the assistance which they gave to my undertaking, and the encouragement which they afforded me during its execution.

The whole of my auditors rendered my labour extremely agreeable to me by their indulgence, their attentive participation, and their readiness to distinguish, in a feeling manner, every passage which seemed worthy of their applause.

It was a flattering moment for me, which I shall never forget, when, in the last hour, after I had called up recollections of the old German renown sacred to every one possessed of true patriotic sentiment, and when the minds of my auditors were thus more solemnly attuned, I was at last obliged to take my leave powerfully agitated by the reflection that this relation, founded on a common love for a nobler mental cultivation, would be so soon dissolved, and that I should never again see those together who were then assembled around me. A general emotion was perceptible, excited by so much that I could not say, but respecting which our hearts understood each other. In the mental dominion of thought and poetry, inaccessible to wordly power,

the Germans, who are separated in so many ways from each other, still feel their unity; and in this feeling, whose interpreter the writer and orator must be, amidst our clouded prospects we may still cherish the elevating presage of the great and immortal calling of our people, who from time immemorial have remained unmixed in their present habitations.

Geneva,
February, 1809.

*Observation prefixed to Part of the Work printed
in 1811.*

THE declaration in the Preface that these Lectures were, with some additions, printed as they were delivered, is in so far to be corrected, that the additions in the second part are much more considerable than in the first. The restriction, in point of time in the oral delivery, compelled me to leave more gaps in the last half than in the first. The part respecting Shakspeare and the English theatre, in particular, have been almost altogether re-written. I have been prevented, partly by the want of leisure and partly by the limits of the work, from treating of the Spanish theatre with that fulness which its importance deserves.

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LECTURES

ON

DRAMATIC LITERATURE.

LECTURE I.

Introduction.—Spirit of true criticism.—Difference of taste between the ancients and moderns.—Classical and romantic poetry and art.—Division of dramatic literature: the ancients, their imitators, and the romantic poets.—Definition of the drama.—View of the theatres of all nations.

THE object which we propose to ourselves in these Lectures is to investigate the principles of dramatic literature, and to consider whatever is connected with the fable, composition, and representation, of theatrical productions. We have selected the drama in preference to every other department of poetry. It will not be expected of us that we should enter scientifically into the first principles of theory. Poetry is in general closely connected with the other fine arts; and, in some degree, the eldest sister and guide of the rest. The necessity for the fine arts, and the pleasure

derivable from them, originate in a principle of our nature, which it is the business of the philosopher to investigate and to classify. This object has given rise to many profound disquisitions, especially in Germany; and the name of *aesthetic** (perceptive) has, with no great degree of propriety, been conferred on this department of philosophy. Aesthetics, or the philosophical theory of beauty and art, is of the utmost importance in its connexion with other inquiries into the human mind; but, considered by itself, it is not of sufficient practical instruction; and it can only become so by its union with the history of the arts. We give the appellation of criticism to the intermediate province between general theory and experience or history. The comparing together and judging the existing productions of the human mind must supply us with a knowledge of the means which are requisite for the conception and execution of masterly works of art.

We will therefore endeavour to throw light on the history of the dramatic art by the torch of criticism. In the course of this attempt it will be necessary to adopt many a proposition, without proof, from general theory; but I hope that the manner in which this shall be done will not be considered as objectionable.

Before I proceed farther, I wish to say a few words respecting the spirit of my criticism, a study to which I have devoted a great part of my life.

* From *Aisthesis*, *sentiendi vim habens*.—TRANS.

We see numbers of men, and even whole nations, so much fettered by the habits of their education and modes of living, that they cannot shake themselves free from them, even in the enjoyment of the fine arts. Nothing to them appears natural, proper, or beautiful, which is foreign to their language, their manners, or their social relations. In this exclusive mode of seeing and feeling, it is no doubt possible, by means of cultivation, to attain a great nicety of discrimination in the narrow circle within which they are limited and circumscribed. But no man can be a true critic or connoisseur who does not possess a universality of mind, who does not possess the flexibility, which, throwing aside all personal predilections and blind habits, enables him to transport himself into the peculiarities of other ages and nations, to feel them as it were from their proper central point; and, what ennobles human nature, to recognize and respect whatever is beautiful and grand under those external modifications which are necessary to their existence, and which sometimes even seem to disguise them. There is no monopoly of poetry for certain ages and nations; and consequently that despotism in taste, by which it is attempted to make those rules universal which were at first perhaps arbitrarily established, is a pretension which ought never to be allowed. Poetry, taken in its widest acceptation, as the power of creating what is beautiful, and representing it to the eye or the ear, is a universal gift of Heaven, which is even shared to a certain extent by those whom we call barbarians and savages. Internal

excellence is alone decisive, and where this exists we must not allow ourselves to be repelled by external appearances. Every thing must be traced up to the root of our existence: if it has sprung from thence, it must possess an undoubted worth; but if, without possessing a living germ, it is merely an external appendage, it can never thrive nor acquire a proper growth. Many productions which appear at first sight dazzling phenomena in the province of the fine arts, and which as a whole have been honoured with the appellation of works of a golden age, resemble the mimic gardens of children: impatient to witness the work of their hands they break off here and there branches and flowers, and plant them in the earth; every thing at first assumes a noble appearance; the childish gardener struts proudly up and down among his elegant beds, till the rootless plants begin to droop, and hang down their withered leaves and flowers, and nothing soon remains but the bare twigs, while the dark forest, on which no art or care was ever bestowed, and which towered up towards heaven long before human remembrance, bears every blast unshaken, and fills the solitary beholder with religious awe.

Let us now think of applying the idea which we have been developing, of the universality of true criticism, to the history of poetry and the fine arts. We generally limit it, (although there may be much which deserves to be known beyond this circle) as we limit what we call universal history to whatever has had a nearer or more remote influence on the present cultivation of Europe: con-

sequently to the works of the Greeks and Romans, and of those of the modern European nations, who first and chiefly distinguished themselves in art and literature. It is well known that, three centuries and a half ago, the study of ancient literature, by the diffusion of the Grecian language, (for the Latin was never extinct,) received a new life: the classical authors were sought after with avidity, and made accessible by means of the press; and the monuments of ancient art were carefully dug up and preserved. All this excited the human mind in a powerful manner, and formed a decided epoch in the history of our cultivation; the fruits have extended to our times, and will extend to a period beyond the power of our calculation. But the study of the ancients was immediately carried to a most pernicious extent. The learned, who were chiefly in the possession of this knowledge, and who were incapable of distinguishing themselves by their own productions, yielded an unlimited deference to the ancients, and with great appearance of reason, as they are models in their kind. They maintained that nothing could be hoped for the human mind but in the imitation of the ancients; and they only esteemed in the works of the moderns whatever resembled, or seemed to bear a resemblance to, those of antiquity. Every thing else was rejected by them as barbarous and unnatural. It was quite otherwise with the great poets and artists. However strong their enthusiasm for the ancients, and however determined their purpose of entering into competition with them, they were

compelled by the characteristic peculiarity of their minds, to proceed in a track of their own, and to impress upon their productions the stamp of their own genius. Such was the case with Dante among the Italians, the father of modern poetry; he acknowledged Virgil for his instructor, but produced a work which, of all others, differs the most from the *Æneid*, and far excels it in our opinion, in strength, truth, depth, and comprehension. It was the same afterwards with Ariosto, who has most unaccountably been compared to Homer; for nothing can be more unlike. It was the same in the fine arts with Michael Angelo and Raphael, who were without doubt well acquainted with the antique. When we ground our judgment of modern painters merely on their resemblance of the ancients, we must necessarily be unjust towards them; and hence Winkelmann has undoubtedly been guilty of injustice to Raphael. As the poets for the most part acquiesced in the doctrines of the learned, we may observe a curious struggle in them between their natural inclination and their imagined duty. When they sacrificed to the latter they were praised by the learned; but by yielding to their own inclinations they became the favourites of the people. What preserves the heroic poems of a Tasso and a Camoëns to this day alive, in the hearts and on the lips of their countrymen, is by no means their imperfect resemblance to Virgil, or even to Homer, but in Tasso the tender feeling of chivalrous love and honour, and in Camoëns the glowing inspiration of patriotic heroism.

Those very ages, nations, and classes, that were least in want of a poetry of their own, were the most assiduous in their imitation of the ancients. Hence the dull scholastic exercises which could at most excite a cold admiration. But, in the fine arts, mere imitation is always fruitless; what we borrow from others must be again as it were born in us, to produce a poetical effect. Of what avail is all foreign imitation? Art cannot exist without nature, and man can give nothing to his fellow men but himself.

The genuine followers of the ancients, those who attempted to rival them, who from a similarity of disposition and cultivation proceeded in their track, and acted in their spirit, were at all times as few as their mechanical spiritless imitators were numerous. The great body of critics, seduced by external appearance, have been always but too indulgent even to these imitators. They held them up as correct modern classics, while those animated poets, who had become the favourites of their respective nations, and to whose sublimity it was impossible to be altogether blind, were at most but tolerated by them as rude and wild natural geniuses. But the unqualified separation of genius and taste which they assume is altogether untenable. Genius is the almost unconscious choice of the highest degree of excellence, and consequently it is taste in its greatest perfection.

In this state, nearly, matters continued till a period not far back, when several inquiring minds, chiefly Germans, endeavoured to clear up the mis-

conception, and to hold the ancients in proper estimation, without being insensible to the merits of the moderns of a totally different description. The apparent contradiction did not intimidate them.— The ground work of human nature is no doubt every where the same; but in all our investigations we may observe that there is no fundamental power throughout the whole range of nature so simple, but that it is capable of dividing and diverging into opposite directions. The whole play of living motion hinges on harmony and contrast. Why then should not this phenomenon be repeated in the history of man? This idea led, perhaps, to the discovery of the true key to the ancient and modern history of poetry and the fine arts. Those who adopted it gave to the peculiar spirit of *modern* art, as opposed to the *antique* or *classical*, the name of *romantic*. The appellation is certainly not unsuitable: the word is derived from *romance*, the name of the language of the people which was formed from the mixture of Latin and Teutonic, in the same manner as modern cultivation is the fruit of the union of the peculiarities of the northern nations with the fragments of antiquity. Hence the cultivation of the ancients was much more of a piece than ours.

The distinction which we have just stated can hardly fail to appear well founded, if it can be shown that the same contrast in the labours of the ancients and moderns runs symmetrically, I might almost say systematically, throughout every branch of art, as far as our knowledge of antiquity extends;

that it is as evident in music and the plastic arts as in poetry. This proposition still remains to be demonstrated in its full extent, though we have many excellent observations on different parts of the subject.

Among the foreign authors who wrote before this school can be said to have been formed in Germany, we may mention Rousseau, who acknowledged the contrast in music, and demonstrated that rhythmus and melody constituted the prevailing principle of the ancients, and harmony that of the moderns. In his prejudices against harmony, however, we altogether differ from him. On the subject of the plastic arts an ingenious observation was made by Hemsterhuys, that the ancient painters were probably too much sculptors, and that the modern sculptors are too much painters. This is the exact point of difference; for I shall distinctly show, in the sequel, that the spirit of ancient art and poetry is *plastic*, and that of the moderns *picturesque*.

By an example taken from another art, that of architecture, I shall endeavour to illustrate what I mean by this contrast. In the middle ages there prevailed a style of architecture, which, in the last centuries especially, was carried to the utmost degree of perfection; and which, whether justly or unjustly, has been called Gothic architecture. When, on the general revival of classical antiquity, the imitation of Grecian architecture became prevalent, and but too frequently without a due regard to the difference of climate and manners and the destination of the structure, the zealots of this new taste passed a sweeping sentence of condemnation

on the Gothic, which they reprobated as tasteless, gloomy, and barbarous. This was in some degree pardonable in the Italians, among whom a love for ancient architecture, from the remains of classical edifices which they inherited, and the similarity of their climate to that of the Greeks, might in some sort be said to be innate. But with us, inhabitants of the North, the first powerful impression on entering a Gothic cathedral is not so easily eradicated. We feel, on the contrary, a strong desire to investigate and to justify the source of this impression. A very slight attention will convince us, that the Gothic architecture not only displays an extraordinary degree of mechanical dexterity, but also an astonishing power of invention; and, on a closer examination, we become impressed with the strongest conviction of its profound character, and of its constituting a full and perfect system in itself, as well as the Grecian.

To the application!—The Pantheon is not more different from Westminster Abbey or the church of St. Stephen at Vienna, than the structure of a tragedy of Sophocles from a drama of Shakspeare. The comparison between these wonderful productions of poetry and architecture might be carried still farther. But does our admiration of the one compel us to depreciate the other? May we not admit that each is great and admirable in its kind, although the one is, and ought to be, different from the other? The experiment is worth attempting. We will quarrel with no man for his predilection either for the Grecian or the Gothic. The world is

wide, and affords room for a great diversity of objects. Narrow and exclusive prepossessions will never constitute a genuine critic or connoisseur, who ought, on the contrary, to possess the power of elevating himself above all partial views, and of subduing all personal inclinations.

For the justification of our object, namely, the grand division which we lay down in the history of art, and according to which we conceive ourselves equally warranted in establishing the same division in dramatic literature, it might be sufficient merely to have stated this contrast between the ancient, or classical, and the romantic. But as there are exclusive admirers of the ancients, who never cease asserting that all deviation from them is merely the whim of recent critics, who express themselves on the subject in a language full of mystery, but cautiously avoid conveying their sentiments in a tangible shape, I shall endeavour to explain the origin and spirit of the *romantic*, and then leave the world to judge if the use of the word, and of the idea which it is intended to convey, are sufficiently justified.

The formation* of the Greeks was a natural education in its utmost perfection. Of a beautiful and noble race, endowed with susceptible senses and a clear understanding, placed beneath a mild heaven, they lived and bloomed in the full health

* *Bildung* in the original. *Formation* is hardly used in this sense in English; but I know no single English word which approaches nearer to it. *Bilden* in German is synonymous with the Greek *αἰσθησις*.—TRANS.

of existence; and, under a singular coincidence of favourable circumstances, performed all of which our circumscribed nature is capable. The whole of their art and their poetry is expressive of the consciousness of this harmony of all their faculties. They have invented the poetry of gladness.

Their religion was the deification of the powers of nature and of the earthly life: but this worship, which, among other nations, clouded the imagination with images of horror, and filled the heart with unrelenting cruelty, assumed, among the Greeks, a mild, a grand, and a dignified form. Superstition, too often the tyrant of the human faculties, seemed to have here contributed to their freest developement. It cherished the arts by which it was ornamented, and the idols became models of ideal beauty.

But however far the Greeks may have carried beauty, and even morality, we cannot allow any higher character to their formation than that of a refined and ennobled sensuality. Let it not be understood that I assert this to be true in every instance. The conjectures of a few philosophers, and the irradiations of poetical inspiration, constitute an exception. Man can never altogether turn aside his thoughts from infinity, and some obscure recollections will always remind him of his original home; but we are now speaking of the principal object towards which his endeavours are directed.

Religion is the root of human existence. Were it possible for man to renounce all religion, in-

cluding that of which he is unconscious, and over which he has no control, he would become a mere surface without any internal substance. When this centre is disturbed the whole system of the mental faculties must receive another direction.

And this is what has actually taken place in modern Europe through the introduction of Christianity. This sublime and beneficent religion has regenerated the ancient world from its state of exhaustion and debasement; it has become the guiding principle in the history of modern nations, and even at this day, when many suppose they have shaken off its authority, they will find themselves in all human affairs much more under its influence than they themselves are aware.

After Christianity, the character of Europe, since the commencement of the middle ages, has been chiefly influenced by the Germanic race of northern conquerors, who infused new life and vigour into a degenerated people. The stern nature of the north drives man back within himself; and what is withdrawn from the free development of the senses, must, in noble dispositions, be added to their earnestness of mind. Hence the honest cordiality with which Christianity was received by all the Teutonic tribes, in whom it penetrated more deeply, displayed more powerful effects, and became more interwoven with all human feelings, than in the case of any other people.

From a union of the rough but honest heroism of the northern conquerors and the sentiments of Christianity, chivalry had its origin, of which the

object was, by holy and respected vows, to guard those who bore arms from every rude and ungenerous abuse of strength, into which it was so easy to deviate.

With the virtues of chivalry was associated a new and purer spirit of love, an inspired homage for genuine female worth, which was now revered as the pinnacle of humanity; and, enjoined by religion itself under the image of a virgin mother, infused into all hearts a sentiment of unalloyed goodness.

As Christianity was not, like the heathen worship, satisfied with certain external acts, but claimed a dominion over the whole inward man and the most hidden movements of the heart; the feeling of moral independence was in like manner preserved alive by the laws of honour, a worldly morality, as it were, which was often at variance with the religious, yet in so far resembled it, that it never calculated consequences, but consecrated unconditionally certain principles of action, as truths elevated beyond all the investigation of casuistical reasoning.

Chivalry, love, and honour, with religion itself, are the objects of the natural poetry which poured itself out in the middle ages with incredible fulness, and preceded the more artificial formation of the romantic character. This age had also its mythology, consisting of chivalrous tales and legends; but their wonders and their heroism were the very reverse of those of the ancient mythology.

Several inquirers, who, in other respects, enter-

tain the same conception of the peculiarities of the moderns, and trace them to the same source that we do, have placed the essence of the northern poetry in melancholy; and to this, when properly understood, we have nothing to object.

Among the Greeks human nature was in itself all-sufficient; they were conscious of no wants, and aspired at no higher perfection than that which they could actually attain by the exercise of their own faculties. We, however, are taught by superior wisdom that man, through a high offence, forfeited the place for which he was originally destined; and that the whole object of his earthly existence is to strive to regain that situation, which, if left to his own strength, he could never accomplish. The religion of the senses had only in view the possession of outward and perishable blessings; and immortality, in so far as it was believed, appeared in an obscure distance like a shadow, a faint dream of this bright and vivid futurity. The very reverse of all this is the case with the Christian: every thing finite and mortal is lost in the contemplation of infinity; life has become shadow and darkness, and the first dawning of our real existence opens in the world beyond the grave. Such a religion must waken the foreboding, which slumbers in every feeling heart, to the most thorough consciousness, that the happiness after which we strive we can never here attain; that no external object can ever entirely fill our souls; and that every mortal enjoyment is but a fleeting and momentary deception. When the soul, resting as it were under

the willows of exile,* breathes out its longing for its distant home, the prevailing character of its songs must be melancholy. Hence the poetry of the ancients was the poetry of enjoyment, and ours is that of desire: the former has its foundation in the scene which is present, while the latter hovers betwixt recollection and hope. Let me not be understood to affirm that every thing flows in one strain of wailing and complaint, and that the voice of melancholy must always be loudly heard. As the austerity of tragedy was not incompatible with the joyous views of the Greeks, so the romantic poetry can assume every tone, even that of the most lively gladness; but still it will always, in some shape or other, bear traces of the source from which it originated. The feeling of the moderns is, upon the whole, more intense, their fancy more incorporeal, and their thoughts more contemplative. In nature, it is true, the boundaries of objects run more into one another, and things are not so distinctly separated as we must exhibit them for the sake of producing a distinct impression.

The Grecian idea of humanity consisted in a perfect concord and proportion between all the powers,—a natural harmony. The moderns again have arrived at the consciousness of the internal discord which renders such an idea impossible; and hence the endeavour of their poetry is to recon-

* *Trauerweiden der verbannung*, literally, *the weeping willows of banishment*; an allusion, as every reader must know, to the 137th Psalm. Linnæus, from this Psalm, calls the weeping willow *Salix Babylonica*.—TRANS.

cile these two worlds between which we find ourselves divided, and to melt them indissolubly into one another. The impressions of the senses are consecrated, as it were, from their mysterious connexion with higher feelings ; and the soul, on the other hand, embodies its forebodings, or nameless visions of infinity, in the phenomena of the senses.

In the Grecian art and poetry we find an original and unconscious unity of form and subject ; in the modern, so far as it has remained true to its own spirit, we observe a keen struggle to unite the two, as being naturally in opposition to each other. The Grecian executed what it proposed in the utmost perfection ; but the modern can only do justice to its endeavours after what is infinite by approximation ; and, from a certain appearance of imperfection, is in greater danger of not being duly appreciated.

It would lead us too far, if in the separate arts of architecture, music, and painting, (for the moderns have never had a sculpture of their own) we should endeavour to point out the distinctions which we have here announced, to show the contrast observable in the character of the same arts among the ancients, and thoroughly to investigate and demonstrate their kindred aim.

Neither can we here enter into a more particular consideration of the different kinds and forms of the romantic poetry, but must return to our object, which is dramatic literature. Its division, as in the other departments of art, into the antique and the romantic, will point out to us the course which we have to pursue.

We shall begin with the ancients; then proceed to their imitators, genuine or supposed successors among the moderns; and lastly, we shall consider those poets of latter times, who, either disregarding the classical models, or purposely deviating from them, have proceeded in a path of their own.

Of the ancient dramatists the Greeks can alone be considered as important. The Romans were in this branch at first mere translators of the Greeks, and afterwards imitators, and not always successful imitators. Besides, much less of them has been preserved. Among the modern nations an endeavour to restore the ancient stage, and, if possible, to perfect it, has been displayed in a very conspicuous manner by the Italians and the French. In other nations, also, more or less, especially of late, attempts of the same kind have at times been made in tragedy; for in comedy, the form under which it appears in Plautus and Terence has certainly been more prevalent. Of all the studied imitations of the ancient tragedy the French is that which is the most splendid, which has acquired the greatest renown, and which, consequently, deserves the most attentive investigation. After the French come the modern Italians; viz. Metastasio and Alfieri. The native countries of pantomime drama, which, strictly speaking, can be called tragedy nor comedy in the sense of the ancients, are England and Spain. It began to flourish at the same time in both, somewhat more than two hundred years ago, through Shakespeare and Lope de Vega.

The German stage is the last of all, and has been influenced in the greatest variety of ways by all those which preceded it. It will be proper therefore also to enter last upon its consideration. By this means we shall be better enabled to decide with respect to the directions which it has hitherto taken, and to point out the prospects which are still open to it.

When I promise to go through the history of the Greck and Roman, of the Italian and French, and of the English and Spanish Theatres, in the few hours which are dedicated to these Lectures, I wish it to be understood that I can only enter into such an account of them, as will comprehend their most essential peculiarities under general points of view. Although I confine myself to one branch of poetry, the mass of materials comprehended within that branch is too extensive to be taken in by the eye at once, and this would be the case, were I even to limit myself to one of its subordinate departments. We might read ourselves to death with farces. In the ordinary histories of literature the poets of one language, and one description, are enumerated in succession, without any discrimination, like so many Assyrian and Egyptian Kings in the ancient universal history. There are persons who have an unconquerable passion for the titles of books, and we willingly concede to them the privilege of increasing their number by books on the titles of books. It is much the same thing, however, as in the history of a war to give the name of every soldier who fought in the files of the hostile armies. We

speak only of the generals, and those who performed actions of distinction. In like manner the battles of the human mind, if I may use the expression, have been won by a few intellectual heroes. The history of the developement of art and its various forms may be therefore exhibited in the characteristic view of a number, by no means considerable, of elevated and creative minds.

Before, however, entering upon such a history as we have now described, it will be previously necessary to consider what is meant by *dramatic*, *theatrical*, *tragic*, and *comic*.

What is dramatic? To many the answer will seem very easy: where various persons are introduced conversing together, and the poet does not speak in his own person. This is, however, merely the first external foundation of the form; it is dialogue. When the characters deliver thoughts and sentiments opposed to each other, but which operate no change, and which leave the minds of both in exactly the same state in which they were at the commencement; the conversation may indeed be deserving of attention, but can be productive of no dramatic interest. I shall make this clear by alluding to a more tranquil species of dialogue, not adapted for the stage, the philosophic. When, in Plato, Socrates asks the conceited sophist Hippias, what is the meaning of the beautiful, the latter is at once ready with a superficial answer, but is afterwards compelled by the disguised attacks of Socrates to give up his former definition, and to grope about him for other ideas, till, ashamed at last

and irritated at the superiority of the sage who has convicted him of his ignorance, he is reduced to quit the field; this dialogue is not merely philosophically instructive, but arrests the attention like a little drama. And therefore this animation in the progress of the thoughts, the anxiety with which we look to the result, in a word, the dramatic nature of the dialogues of Plato has always been very justly celebrated.

From this we may conceive the great charm of dramatic poetry. Action is the true enjoyment of life, nay, life itself. Mere passive enjoyments may lull us into a state of obtuse satisfaction, but even then, when possessed of internal activity, we cannot avoid being soon wearied. The great bulk of mankind are merely from their situation, or from their incapacity for uncommon exertions, confined within a narrow circle of insignificant operations. Their days flow on in succession according to the drowsy laws of custom, their life is imperceptible in its progress, and the bursting torrent of the first passions of youth soon settles into a stagnant marsh. From the discontent which they feel with their situation they are compelled to have recourse to all sorts of diversions, which uniformly consist in a species of occupation that may be renounced at pleasure, and though a struggle with difficulties, yet with difficulties that are easily surmounted. But of all diversions the theatre is undoubtedly the most entertaining. We see important actions when we cannot act importantly ourselves. The highest object of human activity is man, and in the drama

we see men, from motives of friendship or hostility, measure their powers with each other, influence each other as intellectual and moral beings by their thoughts, sentiments, and passions, and decidedly determine their reciprocal relations. The art of the poet is to separate from the fable whatever does not essentially belong to it, whatever, in the daily necessities of real life, and the petty occupations to which they give rise, interrupts the progress of important actions, and to concentrate within a narrow space a number of events calculated to fill the minds of the hearers with attention and expectation. In this manner it affords us a renovated picture of life; a compendium of whatever is animated and interesting in human existence.

This is not all.—Even in a lively verbal relation, it is frequently customary to introduce persons in conversation with each other, and to give a corresponding variety to the tone and the language. But the gaps, which these conversations still leave in the story, are filled up with a description of the accompanying circumstances, or other particulars, by the person who relates in his own name. The dramatic poet must renounce all such assistance; but for this he is richly recompensed in the following invention. He requires each of the characters in his action to be represented by a real person; that this person in size, age, and figure, should resemble as much as possible the ideas which we are to form of his imaginary being, and even assume every peculiarity by which that being is distinguished; that every speech should be delivered in a suitable

tone of voice, and accompanied by corresponding looks and motions; and that those external circumstances should be added which are necessary to give the hearers a clear idea of what is going forward. Moreover these representations of the creatures of his imagination must appear in the costume suitable to their assumed rank, age, and country; partly that they may bear a greater resemblance to them, and partly because there is something characteristic even in the dresses. Lastly he must see them surrounded by a place which in some degree resembles that where, according to his fable, the action took place, because this also contributes to the resemblance: he places them on a scene. All this brings us to the idea of the *theatre*. It is evident that in the form of dramatic poetry, that is, in the representation of an action by dialogue without any relation, the ingredient of a theatre is essentially necessary. We allow that there are dramatic works which were not originally destined by their authors for the stage, and which would not produce any great effect on it, that still afford great pleasure in the perusal. I am, however, very much inclined to doubt whether they would produce the same strong impression upon a person who had never seen a play, and never heard a description of one, which they do upon us. We are accustomed, in reading dramatic works, to supply the representation ourselves.

The invention of the dramatic art, and that of a theatre, seem to lie very near one another. Man has a great disposition to mimicry; when he enters vi-

vidly into the situation, sentiments, and passions of others, he even involuntarily puts on a resemblance to them in his gestures. Children are perpetually going out of themselves; it is one of their chief amusements to represent those grown people whom they have had an opportunity of observing, or whatever comes in their way; and with the happy flexibility of their imagination, they can exhibit all the characteristics of assumed dignity in a father, a schoolmaster, or a king. The sole step which is requisite for the invention of a drama, namely, the separating and extracting the mimetic elements and fragments from social life, and representing them collected together into one mass, has not however been taken in many nations. In the very minute description of ancient Egypt in Herodotus and other writers, I do not recollect observing the smallest trace of it. The Etrurians again, who in many respects resembled the Egyptians, had their theatrical representations; and, what is singular enough, the Etruscan name for an actor, *histrion*, is preserved in living languages down to the present day. The Arabians and Persians, though possessed of a rich poetical literature, are unacquainted with any sort of drama. It was the same with Europe in the middle ages. On the introduction of Christianity, the plays handed down among the Greeks and Romans were abolished, partly from their reference to heathen ideas, and partly, because they had degenerated into the most impudent and indecent immorality; and they were not again revived till after the lapse of nearly a

thousand years. Even in the fourteenth century we do not find in Boccacio, who, however, gives us a most accurate picture of the whole constitution of social life, the smallest trace of plays. In place of them they had then only story-tellers, minstrels, and jugglers, (*conteurs, menestriers, jongleurs*). On the other hand we are by no means entitled to assume, that the invention of the drama has only once taken place in the world, and that it has always been borrowed by one people from another. The English navigators mention that among the islanders of the South Seas, who in every mental qualification and acquirement are in such a low scale of civilization, they yet observed a rude drama, in which a common event in life was imitated for the sake of diversion. And to go to the other extreme: among the Indians, the people from whom perhaps all the cultivation of the human race has been derived, plays were known long before they could have experienced any foreign influence. It has lately been made known to Europe, that they have a rich dramatic literature, which ascends back for more than two thousand years. The only specimen of their plays (*nataks*) hitherto known to us is the delightful *Sakontala*, which, notwithstanding the colouring of a foreign climate, bears in its general structure such a striking resemblance to our romantic drama, that we might be inclined to suspect we owe this resemblance to the predilection for Shakspeare entertained by Jones the English translator, if his fidelity were not confirmed by other learned orientalists. In the golden times

of India, the representation of this natak served to delight the splendid imperial court of Delhi; but it would appear that, from the misery of numberless oppressions, the dramatic art in that country is now entirely at an end. The Chinese again have their standing national theatre, stationary perhaps in every sense of the word; and I do not doubt that, in the establishment of arbitrary rules, and the delicate observance of insignificant points of decorum, they leave the most correct Europeans very far behind them. When the new European stage in the fifteenth century had its origin in the allegorical and spiritual pieces called Moralities and Mysteries, this origin was not owing to the influence of the ancient dramatists, who did not come into circulation till some time afterwards. In those rude beginnings lay the germ of the romantic drama as a peculiar invention.

In this wide extent of theatrical entertainments, we may again remark how great the distance in dramatic talent between nations equally distinguished for intellect; so that theatrical talent, which is essentially different from a poetical gift in general, seems also to have this specific peculiarity. We are not to wonder at the contrast between the Greeks and Romans, for the Greeks were altogether a nation devoted to art, and the Romans a practical people. Among the latter the fine arts were introduced as a luxury, calculated to produce corruption and degeneracy. They carried this luxury so far with respect to the theatre itself, that the perfection of the essential part of the performance

was soon forgot in the immensity of the decorations. Even among the Greeks the dramatic art was far from general. The theatre was invented in Athens, and in Athens alone it was carried to perfection. The Doric dramas of Epicharmus form only a slight exception. All the great creative dramatists of the Greeks were born and formed in Attica. Throughout the whole extent of the Grecian nation, with whatever success the fine arts were almost every where practised, in all other places but Athens they could only admire the productions of the Attic stage, without being able to rival them.

The difference in this respect is astonishing between the Spaniards and their neighbours the Portuguese, related to them by descent and by language. The Spaniards possess a dramatic literature of inexhaustible wealth; their dramatists in fertility resemble the Greeks, of whom more than a hundred pieces can frequently be named. Whatever judgment in other respects may be pronounced on their merits, the praise of invention has never yet been denied to them; this has in fact been but too well ascertained, as Italians, French, and English have all availed themselves of the ingenious inventions of the Spaniards, and often without pointing out the source from which they derived them. The Portuguese again, who in other branches of poetry rival the Spaniards, have hardly done any thing in this department, and have never even had a national theatre; they were from time to time visited by strolling Spanish players; and they chose rather to

listen to a foreign dialect, which if not taught them they could not always understand, than to invent, or at least to translate and imitate, for themselves.

Among the many talents for art and literature displayed by the Italians, the dramatic is by no means pre-eminent, and this defect they would almost seem to have inherited from the Romans, in the same manner as their great talent for mimicry and buffoonery ascends back to the most ancient times. The extemporary compositions called *Fabulæ Atellanæ*, the only original and national dramatic form of the Romans, in respect of plan, were not perhaps more perfect than what is called the *Commedia dell'Arte*, or extemporary comedy with masks. In the ancient Saturnalia we have probably the germ of the present carnival, which is entirely an Italian invention. The opera and ballet were also the invention of the Italians: a species of theatrical amusements, in which the dramatic interest is entirely subordinate to music and dancing.

If the German genius has not developed itself with the same fulness and ease in the dramatic branch as in other departments of literature, this deficiency arises perhaps from the peculiar character of the nation. The Germans are a speculative people, that is, a people who wish to become acquainted with the principle of whatever they are engaged in by reflection and meditation. On that very account they are not sufficiently practical; for if we wish to act with dexterity, vigour, and determination, we must some time or other believe that we have become masters of our subject, and

not be perpetually returning to demonstrate its theory; we must even have settled ourselves into a certain partiality of idea. In the invention and conduct of a drama the practical spirit must prevail: the dramatic poet is not allowed to dream that he is inspired, he must go the straightest way to his object; and the Germans are but too apt to lose sight of their object in the course of their way to it.— Besides; in the drama the national features must be marked in the most prominent manner, and the national character of the Germans is modest and averse to every thing like pretension; and the noble endeavour to become acquainted with, and to appropriate to ourselves whatever is excellent in others, is not seldom accompanied with the undervaluing our own worth. Hence our stage has often, in form and subject, been under more than a due degree of foreign influence. Our object is not, however, the mere passive repetition of the Grecian or French, the Spanish, or English theatres; but we seek, as it appears to me, a form which contains whatever is truly poetical in all these theatres, with the exception of what is founded in local circumstances; in the subject, however, the German national features ought certainly to predominate.

LECTURE II.

Theatrical effect.—Importance of the stage. Principal species of the drama.—Essence of tragedy and comedy.—Seriousness and mirth.—How far it is possible to become acquainted with the ancients without knowing the original languages.—Winkelmann.

AFTER this rapid view of what may be called the map of dramatic literature, we return to the examination of the principal idea. We have already shown that the supposition of a visible representation is essential to the dramatic form; and a dramatic work can therefore be considered in a double point of view, how far it is *poetical*, and how far it is *theatrical*.—The two are by no means inseparable. I do not mean the poetical expression: I am not now considering the versification and the ornaments of language, though without a higher merit these are the least essential parts of theatrical works, but the poetry in the spirit and plan of a piece; and this may exist in a high degree, when it is even written in prose. How does a drama become poetical? Most assuredly in the very same way as works in other branches become so. It must in the first place be a connected whole, and complete within itself. But this is merely the negative condition of the form of a work of art, by which it is distinguished from the phenomena of nature, which

flow into one another, and do not possess an independent existence. To be poetical it is necessary that it should be a mirror of ideas, that is, thoughts and feelings in their character necessary and eternally true, which soar above this earthly life, and that it should exhibit them embodied before us. The ideas which in this view are essential to the different departments of the drama will hereafter be the object of our investigation. We shall also, by way of contrast, show that without them a drama becomes altogether prosaic and empirical, that is, composed by the understanding from the observation of reality.

But how does a dramatic work become theatrical, or fitted to appear with advantage on the stage? It is often difficult in a single instance to determine whether it may possess such a property or not.— This is frequently the subject of great controversy, especially when the self-love of authors and players comes into collision; the one throws the blame of the failure on the other, and those who advocate the cause of the author complain of the inadequacy of the representation, and the insufficiency of the means afforded to do justice to his conceptions.— But in general the answer to this question is by no means so difficult. The object proposed is to produce an impression on an assembled crowd, to gain their attention, and to excite in them an interest and participation. This part of his business is common to the poet with the orator. How does the latter attain his end? By perspicuity, celerity, and force. Whatever exceeds the ordinary measure

of patience or comprehension must be carefully avoided by him. Moreover, a number of men assembled together constitute an object of distraction to one another, if their eyes and ears are not directed to a common object beyond their circle. Hence the dramatic poet, as well as the orator, must at the very commencement produce such a strong impression as to draw his hearers from themselves, and become masters, as it were, of their bodily attention. There is a species of poetry capable of producing a soft emotion in a mind tuned to solitary contemplation, as the gentle breezes draw forth accordant sounds from an *Æolian* harp. However excellent this poetry may be in itself, without some other accompaniment its tones would be lost on the stage. The melting *harmonica* is not calculated to regulate the march of an army, and kindle its military enthusiasm. For this we must have piercing instruments, but above all a decided rhythmus, to quicken the pulsation and give a more rapid motion to the senses. The grand requisite in a drama is to make this rhythmus visible in its progress. When this has once been effected, the poet may the sooner halt in his rapid career, and indulge his own inclinations. There are points, when the most simple or artless tale, the inspired lyric, the most profound thoughts, and remote allusions, the smartest coruscations of wit, and the most dazzling flights of a sportive or ethereal fancy are all in their place, and when the willing audience, even those who cannot entirely attend them, follow the whole with a greedy

ear, like a music in harmony with their feelings. The great art of the poet is to avail himself of the effect of contrasts, wherever he can, to exhibit at times, in as clear a manner, a quiet stillness, the musings of self contemplation, and even the indolent resignation of exhausted nature; as at other times the most tumultuous emotions, the most raging storm of the passions. With respect to the theatrical, however, we must never forget that much must be suited to the capacities and inclinations of the audience, and consequently to the national character in general, and the particular degree of civilization. Dramatic poetry is in a certain sense the most worldly of all, for from the stillness of an inspired mind, it exhibits itself in the midst of the noise and tumult of social life. The dramatic poet is, more than any other, obliged to court external favour for applause. But he ought to lower himself only in appearance to his hearers; in reality, however, elevate them to himself.

In producing an impression on an assembled multitude, the following circumstance deserves to be weighed, that the whole amount of its importance may be ascertained. In ordinary intercourse men exhibit only their exteriors to one another. They are withheld by suspicion or indifference from allowing others to look into what passes within them; and to speak with any thing like emotion or agitation of that which is nearest our heart would be considered unsuitable to the tone of polished society. The orator and the dramatic poet find means to break down these barriers of conven-

tional reserve. While they transport their hearers to such scenes of mental agitation, that their external signs break involuntarily forth, every man perceives in those around him the same degree of emotion, and those who before were strangers to one another, become in a moment intimately acquainted. The tears which the orator or the dramatic poet compels them to shed for persecuted innocence, or a dying hero, make friends and brothers of them all. The effect produced by seeing a number of others share in the same emotions, on an intense feeling which usually retires into solitude, or only opens itself to the confidence of friendship, is astonishingly powerful. The belief in the justness of the feeling becomes unshaken from its diffusion; we feel ourselves strong among so many associates, and the minds of all flow together in one great and overflowing stream. Hence the privilege of influencing an assembled crowd is exposed to a most dangerous abuse. As we may inspire them in the most disinterested manner, for the noblest and best of purposes, we may also ensnare them by the deceitful webs of sophistry, and dazzle them by the glare of false magnanimity, of which the crimes may be painted as virtues and even as sacrifices. Under the delightful dress of oratory and poetry, the poison steals imperceptibly into the ear and the heart. Above all things let the comic poet take heed, as from the nature of his subject he has a tendency to split on this rock, lest he afford an opportunity for the lower and baser part of human nature to exhibit themselves with-

out any disguise; for if, by the appearance of a common participation in these ignoble propensities, the shame is once overcome, which generally confines them within the bounds of decency, the depraved inclinations soon break out with the most unbridled licentiousness.

The powerful nature of such an engine for either good or bad purposes has justly, in all times, drawn the attention of the legislature to the drama. Many regulations have been devised by different states, to render it subservient to their views, and to guard against abuses. The great difficulty is to combine such a degree of freedom as is necessary for the production of works of excellence, with the precautions demanded by the customs and institutions of every state. In Athens the theatre flourished under the protection of religion, with the most unlimited freedom, and the public morality preserved it for a time from degeneracy. The comedies of Aristophanes, which with our views and habits appear so intolerably licentious, and in which the senate and the people themselves are covered with ridicule, were the seal of the Athenian freedom. Plato, again, who lived in the very same Athens, and witnessed or anticipated the decline of art, proposed the entire banishment of dramatic poets from his ideal republic. Few states however have conceived it necessary to subscribe to this severe sentence of condemnation; but few also have thought proper to leave the theatre to itself, without any superintendence. In many Christian countries the dramatic art has been honoured by being made subservient to religion, in the composition of spiritual

subjects; and in Spain, more especially, competition has given birth to many works which neither devotion nor poetry will disown. In other states and under other circumstances, this has been thought offensive and unadvisable. Where a previous censure, and not merely an after responsibility on the part of the poet and player, is considered indispensable before a piece can appear on the stage, it will be found perhaps the most difficult of application to the very point of all others of the greatest importance: namely, the spirit and general impression of a piece. From the nature of the dramatic art, the poet must put much into the mouths of his characters of which he does not himself approve, and he conceives that his own sentiments should be appreciated from the spirit and connexion of the whole. It may again happen that a piece is perfectly inoffensive with respect to single speeches, and that they defy all censure, while upon the whole it may be calculated to produce the most dangerous effects. We have in our own times seen but too many plays favourably received throughout Europe, overflowing with ebullitions of good heartedness, and traits of magnanimity, and in which, notwithstanding, a mind of any penetration could not mistake the concealed aim of the writer to sap the foundations of moral principles, and the respect for whatever ought to be held in veneration by men; and by that means to make the dissolute effeminacy of his contemporaries the panders to his success.* On the other hand, if any person were to

undertake the defence of the moral tendency of Aristophanes, who has such a bad name, and whose licentiousness in particular passages appears quite irreconcilable with our ideas, he would found it on the general object of his pieces, in which he at least displays the sentiments of a patriotic citizen.

The purport of these observations is to show the importance of the object of our consideration in a convincing manner. The theatre, where the magic of many combined arts can be displayed; where the most elevated and profound poetry has the most finished action for its interpreter, action which is at once eloquence and a living picture; while architecture lends her splendid receptacle, and painting her perspective deceptions, and even music contributes its assistance to attemper the minds, or to heighten by its melody the agitation into which they are already thrown; the theatre, in short, where the whole of the social cultivation and art of a nation, the fruits of centuries of continued exertions, may be represented in a few hours—has an extraordinary charm for every age, sex, and rank, and was ever the most delightful amusement of cultivated nations. Here, the prince, the statesman, and the leader of an army, see the great events of past times, resembling those in which they themselves may be called to act, laid open in their inmost springs and relations; the philosopher finds a subject for the deepest reflections on the nature and constitution of man; the artist follows with a curious eye the groups which pass rapidly before him, which in his fancy he embodies into future

pictures ; the susceptible youth opens his heart to every elevated feeling ; age becomes young in recollection ; even childhood sits with anxious expectation before the gaudy curtain, which is to be drawn up with a rustling noise, and to display so many unknown wonders : all are recreated, all are exhilarated, and all feel themselves for a time elevated above the sorrows and the daily cares and troubles of life. As the dramatic art, with the arts which are subservient to it, from neglect and contempt of artists and the public for one another, may degenerate to such a degree as to convert the theatre into the most trivial and stupid amusement, and even a downright waste of time, we conceive that we shall attempt something more than a light entertainment, if we enter on a consideration of the works produced by the most distinguished nations in their most flourishing times, and institute an inquiry into the means of ennobling and perfecting an art of such high importance.

So much for the importance of our object. We shall now enter into a preliminary consideration of the two opposite kinds into which all dramatic poetry may be divided, the *tragic* and *comic*, and examine the meaning and import of each.

The three principal kinds of poetry are the epic, the lyric, and the dramatic. All the other are either subordinate, or derived from these, or formed from combinations of them. When we wish to represent to ourselves these three kinds in all their purity, we must go back to the times in which they appeared among the Greeks. The theory is suscep-

tible of the most convenient application from the history of Grecian poetry; for this poetry is well entitled to the appellation of systematical; and it contains, for every independent idea derived from experience, the most decisive and unexceptionable examples.

It is singular that in the epic and lyric poetry there is no such division into two opposite kinds, as in the dramatic. The comic epopee has, it is true, been styled a peculiar species, but it is a mere parody of the epos, and consists in applying its solemn developement, which seems only suitable to great objects, to trifling and insignificant events. In lyric poetry there are only intervals and gradations between the song, the ode, and the elegy, but no proper contrast.

The spirit of the epic poem, as it appears in Homer, the father of epic poetry, is clear self-possession. The epos is a tragical representation of an action in progress. The poet relates joyful as well as mournful events, but he relates them with equanimity, and considers them as already past, and at a certain distance from us.

The lyric poem is the musical expression of mental emotions by language. The essence of musical feeling consists in this, that we endeavour from a sense of pleasure to dwell on, and even to perpetuate in our minds, some kind of emotion of a joyful or painful nature. The feeling must consequently be so much mitigated as not to impel us, from desire of pleasure or dread of pain, to tear ourselves from it, but such as to allow us, unconcerned

at the flight of time, to feel ourselves at home for a single moment of our existence.

The dramatic poet represents external events as well as the epic, but he represents them as real and present. He also claims our participation, though not so exclusively as the lyric poet; but he excites a much more immediate feeling of joy and sorrow. He calls forth all the emotions which we experience on seeing the deeds and destinies of real men, and resolves these emotions into the gratification of a harmonious feeling, by the general effect of his impressions. As he approaches so closely to life, and even endeavours to give life to the whole of his poetry, the equanimity of the epic poet would in him be indifference; he must consider himself as forming an essential point in the relations of human life, and compel his audience to participate in the same feeling.

That I may return to a more simple and intelligible language, the *tragic* and *comic* bear the same relation to one another as *earnestness* and *mirth*. Every man is acquainted with both these modifications of mind from his own experience.—But their essence and their source is a subject that demands a deep philosophical investigation. Both, indeed, bear the stamp of our common nature; but earnestness belongs more to the moral, and mirth to the sensual side. The creatures destitute of reason are incapable either of seriousness or mirth. Animals seem indeed at times to labour as if they were earnestly intent upon an aim, and as if they made the present moment subordinate to the

future; at other times they sport, that is, they give themselves up without object to the pleasure of existence: but they do not possess consciousness, which alone can elevate both these conditions to true earnestness and mirth. To man alone, of all the animals with which we are acquainted, is it permitted to look back towards the past, and forward into futurity; and he has purchased this noble privilege at a dear rate. Earnestness, in the most extensive signification, is the direction of our mental powers to some aim. But as soon as we begin to call ourselves to account for our actions, reason compels us to fix this aim higher and higher, till we come at last to the highest end of our existence: and here the desire for what is infinite, which dwells in our being, is thwarted by the limits of the finite by which we are fettered. All that we do, all that we effect, is vain and perishable; death stands every where in the back ground, and every good or ill spent moment brings us in closer contact with him; and even when a man has been so singularly successful as to reach the utmost term of life without misfortune, he must still submit to leave all that is dear to him on earth, or to be left himself in a state of destitution. There is no bond of love without separation; no enjoyment without grief for its loss.—When we contemplate however the relations of our existence to the extreme limit of possibilities: when we reflect on its entire dependence on an endless chain of causes and effects: when we consider that we are exposed in our weak and helpless

state to struggle with the immeasurable powers of nature, and with conflicting desires on the shores of an unknown world, and in danger of shipwreck at our very birth; that we are subject to all manner of errors and deceptions, every one of which is capable of undoing us; that in our passions we carry our own enemy in our bosoms; that every moment demands from us the sacrifice of our dearest inclinations in the name of the most sacred duties, and that we may at one blow be robbed of all that we have acquired by toils and difficulties; that with every extension of possession the danger of loss is proportionally increased, and we are only the more exposed to the snares of hostile attack: then every mind which is not dead to feeling must be overpowered by an inexpressible melancholy, against which there is no other protection than the consciousness of a destiny soaring above this earthly life. This is the tragic tone; and when the mind dwells on the consideration of the possible, as an existing reality, when that tone is inspired by the most striking examples of violent revolutions in human destiny, either from dejection of soul, or after powerful but ineffectual struggles; then *tragic poetry* has its origin. We thus see that tragic poetry has its foundation in our nature, and to a certain extent we have answered the question: why we are fond of mournful representations, and even find something consoling and elevating in them? The accordance which we have described is inseparable from strong feeling;

and when there is an internal dissonance which poetry cannot remove, it should at least endeavour to attempt an ideal solution.

As earnestness, in the highest degree, is the essence of the tragic tone, the essence of the comic is mirth. The disposition to mirth is a forgetfulness of all gloomy considerations in the pleasant feeling of present happiness. We are then inclined to view every thing in a sportive light, and to admit no impressions calculated to disturb or ruffle us. The imperfections of men, and the irregularities in their conduct to one another, become no longer an object of our dislike and compassion, but serve, by their contrasts, to entertain the mind and delight the fancy. The comic poet must therefore carefully abstain from whatever is calculated to excite moral disgust with the conduct of men, or sympathy with their situation, because this would inevitably bring us back to earnestness. He must paint their irregularities as arising out of the predominance of the sensual part of their nature, and as constituting a mere ludicrous infirmity, which can be attended with no ruinous consequences. This is uniformly what takes place in what we call comedy, in which however there is still a mixture of seriousness, as I shall show in the sequel. The oldest comedy of the Greeks was however, entirely gay, and in that respect formed the most complete contrast with their tragedy. Not only the characters and situations of individuals were worked up into a picture of the true comic, but the state, the constitution, the gods, and nature,

were all fantastically painted in the most extravagantly ridiculous and laughable colours.

When we have formed in this manner a pure idea of the tragic and comic, as exhibited to us in Grecian examples, we shall then be enabled to analyze the various mixtures of both, displayed by the moderns, and to discriminate and separate the legitimate ingredients from those of a different description.

In the history of poetry and the fine arts among the Greeks, their developement was subjected to an invariable law of separating in the most rigid manner every thing dissimilar, and afterwards combining and elevating the similar, by internal excellence, to one independent and harmonious whole. Hence the various departments, with them, are all confined within their natural boundaries, and the different styles distinctly marked. In beginning, therefore, with the history of the Grecian art and poetry, we are not merely observing the order of time, but also the order of ideas.

In the majority of my hearers, I can hardly suppose an immediate knowledge of the Greeks, derived from the study of the original language. Translations in prose, or even in verse, which are nothing more than dresses in the modern taste, can afford no true idea of the Grecian drama. True and faithful translations, which endeavour in expression and versification to rise to the height of the original, have as yet been attempted only in German. But although our language is extremely flexible, and in many respects resembling the Greek, it is still a battle with unequal weapons; and stiffness and

hardness not unfrequently supply the place of the easy sweetness of the Greek. But we are even far from having yet done all that can perhaps be accomplished : I know of no translation of a Greek tragedian deserving of unqualified praise. But even supposing the translation as perfect as possible, and to deviate very little from the original, the reader who is not acquainted with the other works of the Greeks, will be perpetually disturbed by the foreign nature of the subject, by national peculiarities, and numerous allusions which cannot be understood without learning, and prevented by particular parts, from forming a clear idea of the whole. So long as we have to struggle with difficulties, it is impossible for us to have any true enjoyment of art. To feel the ancients as we ought, we must have become in some degree one of themselves, and breathed as it were the Grecian air.

What is the best means of becoming imbued with the spirit of the Greeks, without a knowledge of their language? I answer without hesitation,—the study of the antique; and when this is impossible in the original, it is, by means of casts, to a certain extent within the power of every man. These models of the human form require no interpretation; their elevated character is imperishable, and will always be recognized throughout every succession of ages, and in every clime, where a noble race of men related to the Greek (which the European undoubtedly is) shall exist, and wherever the unkindness of nature has not sunk the human features too much below the pure standard,

and, by habituating them to their own deformity, rendered them insensible to genuine corporeal beauty. Respecting the inimitable perfection of the antique in its few remains of a first rate character, there is but one voice throughout the whole of civilized Europe ; and if ever their merit was called in question, it was in times when the plastic art of the moderns had sunk to the lowest degree of mannerism. Not only all intelligent artists, but all men of any degree of feeling, bow with the most enthusiastic adoration to the masterly productions of ancient sculpture.

The best key to enter this sanctuary of beauty, by deep and self-collected contemplation, is the history of art of our immortal Winkelmann. In particular parts, there are no doubt many deficiencies ; it is even full of important errors, but no man has so deeply penetrated into the innermost spirit of Grecian art. Winkelmann transformed himself completely into an ancient, and lived only in appearance in his own century, unmoved by its influence.

The immediate subject of his work is the plastic arts, but it contains also many important views respecting other branches of Grecian cultivation, and is very useful as a preparation for the understanding their poetry, and especially their dramatic poetry. As this was destined for visible representation before spectators whose eye must have been as difficult to please on the stage as elsewhere, we have no better means of feeling the whole dignity of their idea of the tragic, and of giving it a sort of

theatrical animation, than to have always present to our fancy the forms of their gods and heroes. This may appear somewhat singular at present, but I hope to be able in the sequel to demonstrate, in a more convincing manner, that we can only become properly acquainted with the tragedies of Sophocles, before the groupes of Niobe or Laocœon.

We are yet without a work in which the formation and cultivation of the Greeks in poetry, art, science, and social life, should be painted as one grand and harmonious whole, as a true work of nature displaying the most astonishing symmetry and proportion in its parts, and in which the connexion of their common developement should be traced in the same spirit which Winkelmann has exhibited in the part which he has executed. An attempt has indeed been made in a popular work which is in every body's hands, I mean the *Travels of the Younger Anacharsis*. This book is valuable for its learning, and may be very useful in diffusing a knowledge of antiquities; but, without censuring the errors of the dress in which it is exhibited, it betrays more good will to do justice to the Greeks, than ability to enter deeply into their spirit. In this respect the work is in many points superficial, and even disfigured with modern views. It is not the travels of a young Scythian, but of an old Parisian.

The superiority of the Greeks, as I have already said, is the most universally acknowledged in the fine arts. An enthusiasm for their literature is in a great measure confined to the English and

Germans, among whom also the study of the Grecian language is the most zealously prosecuted. It is singular that the French critics of all others, they who principally acknowledge the remains of the theoretical writings of the ancients on literature, Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, &c. as infallible standards of taste, should yet distinguish themselves by the contemptuous and irreverent manner in which they speak of their poetical compositions, and especially of their dramatic literature. Look for instance, into a book very much read,—La Harpe's *Cours de Litterature*. It contains many nice observations respecting the French Theatre; but he who should think of knowing the Greeks from it would be very ill advised: the author was as much deficient in a solid knowledge of their literature as in a sense for relishing it. Voltaire is often, also, most insupportable in his depreciation of the Greeks: he elevates or lowers them at the suggestions of his caprice, or as the necessity of the moment to produce such or such an effect on the mind of the public renders it expedient. I remember too to have read a rapid view of the Greek tragedies, somewhere in Metastasio, in which he treats their poets like so many school-boys. Racine is much more modest, and cannot be in any manner charged with this sort of presumption: he was of all of them, the best acquainted with the Greeks. It is easy to see into the motives of these hostile critics. The national vanity, and the vanity of the author, will afford us an easy solution: they conceive they have far surpassed the ancients, and they venture to com-

init such observations to the public, knowing that the works of the ancient poets, accessible only to the learned, have come down to us a mere dead letter, without the animating accompaniment of recitation, music, ideal and truly plastic imitation, and scenic pomp ; all which in Athens was in such wonderful harmony with the poetry, that if once it could be represented to our eye and ear, it would silence the whole herd of these noisy and interested critics. The ancient statues require no commentary ; they speak for themselves, and every thing like supposed competition on the part of a modern artist would appear only in the light of ludicrous pretension. In the theatre, we lay great stress on the infancy of the art ; and because their poets lived two thousand years before us, we conclude that we must have carried it farther than they did. In this way poor *Æschylus* is generally got rid of. But if we are to call it the infancy of the dramatic art, it was the infancy of a *Hercules*, who strangled serpents in his cradle.

I have already expressed myself on the subject of that partiality for the ancients, which would limit their excellence to a frigid exemption from error, and which exhibits them as models in such a way as to put a stop to every thing like improvement, and reduce us to abandon the exercise of art as altogether fruitless. I am much rather disposed to believe that poetry, as the fervid expression of our whole being, must assume a new and peculiar form in different ages. I entertain, however, an enthusiastic adoration for the Greeks, as a people endowed by

the peculiar favour of nature with the most perfect feeling for art, in the consciousness of which they gave to all the nations with which they were acquainted, compared with themselves, the appellation of barbarians,—an appellation, in the use of which they were in some degree justified. I would not wish to imitate certain travellers, who, in returning from a country which their readers cannot easily visit, tell so many wondrous things as to injure their credibility. I shall rather endeavour to characterize them as they appear to me after sedulous and repeated study, without concealing their defects, and to bring a living picture of the Grecian scene before the eyes of my hearers.

We shall first treat of the Tragedy of the Greeks, then of their *old* Comedy, and lastly of the new Comedy which arose out of it.

The same theatrical accompaniments were common to all the three kinds. We must, therefore, give a short preliminary view of their architecture and ornaments, that we may have a distinct idea of their representation.

The histrionic art of the ancients had also many peculiarities, the use of masks for example, although these were quite different in tragedy and comedy ; in the former *ideal*, and in the latter, at least in the old comedy, somewhat caricatured.

In tragedy, we shall first consider what constituted its most distinctive peculiarity among the ancients : the ideality of the representation, the prevailing idea of destiny, and the chorus ; and we shall lastly treat of their mythology as the materials

of tragic poetry. We shall then proceed to characterize, in the tragedians still remaining, the different styles; that is, the necessary epochs in the history of the tragic art.

LECTURE III.

Structure of the stage among the Greeks.—Their acting.—Use of masks.—False comparison of ancient tragedy to the opera.—Tragical lyric poetry.—Essence of the Greek Tragedies.—Ideality of the representation.—Idea of fate.—Source of the pleasure derived from tragical representations.—Import of the chorus.—The materials of Greek tragedy derived from mythology.—Comparison with the plastic art.

WHEN we hear the word *theatre*, we naturally think of what with us bears the same name; and yet nothing can be more different from our theatre than the Grecian in every part of its construction. If in reading the Grecian pieces we associate our own stage with them, the light in which we shall view them must be false in every respect.

The accurate mathematical dimensions of the principal part of it are to be found in Vitruvius, who also distinctly points out the great difference between the Greek and Roman theatres. But these and similar passages of the ancient writers have been most perversely interpreted by architects unacquainted with the ancient dramatists;* and the philologists on the other hand, who were altogether

* We have a remarkable instance of this, in the pretended ancient theatre of Palladio, at Vicenza. Herculaneum, it is true, had not then been discovered, and the ruins of the ancient theatre are not easily understood, if we have never seen one in an entire state.

ignorant of architecture, have also fallen into egregious errors. The ancient dramatists are still, therefore, altogether in want of that sort of illustration which relates to scenic regulation. In many tragedies I conceive that my ideas on this subject are sufficiently clear; but others again present difficulties which are not so easily solved. We find ourselves most at a loss in figuring to ourselves the representation of the pieces of Aristophanes: the ingenious poet must have brought his wonderful inventions before the eyes of his audience, in a manner equally bold and astonishing. Even Barthélemy's description of the Grecian stage is not a little confused; and the subjoined plan extremely erroneous; in the place which he assigns for the representation of the pieces, in *Antigone* and *Ajax* for instance, he is altogether wrong. The following observations will therefore appear the less superfluous.*

The theatres of the Greeks were quite open above, and their dramas were always acted in open day, and beneath the canopy of heaven. The Romans, at an after period, endeavoured by a covering to shelter the audience from the rays of the sun; but

* I am partly indebted for them to the illustrations of a learned architect, M. Genelli, of Berlin, author of the ingenious *Letters on Vitruvius*. We have compared several Greek tragedies with our interpretation of this description of Vitruvius, and endeavoured to figure to ourselves the manner in which they were represented; and I afterwards found my ideas confirmed, on an examination of the theatre of Herculaneum, and the two very small theatres at Pompeii.

this degree of luxury was hardly ever enjoyed by the Greeks. Such a state of things appears very inconvenient to us ; but the Greeks had nothing of effeminacy about them, and we must not forget, too, the beauty of their climate. When they were overtaken by a storm or a shower, the play was of course interrupted ; and they would much rather expose themselves to an accidental inconvenience, than, by shutting themselves up in a close and crowded house, entirely destroy the serenity of a religious solemnity, which their plays certainly were.* To have covered in the scene itself, and imprisoned gods and heroes in dark and gloomy apartments with difficulty lighted up, would have appeared still more ridiculous to them. An action which so nobly served to establish the belief of the relation with heaven could only be exhibited under an unobstructed heaven, and under the very eyes of the gods as it were, for whom, according to Seneca, the sight of a brave man struggling with adversity is a becoming spectacle. With respect to the supposed inconvenience, which, according to the assertion of many modern critics, was felt by the poets from the necessity of always laying the scene of their pieces before houses, a circumstance that often forced them to violate probability, this inconvenience was very little felt by tragedy and the

* They carefully made choice of a beautiful situation. The theatre at Tauromenium, at present Taormina, in Sicily, of which the ruins are still visible, was, according to Münter's description, situated in such a manner that the audience had a view of Ætna over the back ground of the theatre.

older comedy. The Greeks, like many southern nations of the present day, lived much more in the open air than we do, and transacted many things in public places which usually take place with us in houses. For the theatre did not represent the street, but a place before the house belonging to it, where the altar stood on which sacrifices to the household gods were offered up. Here the women, who lived in so retired a manner among the Greeks, even those who were unmarried, might appear without any impropriety. Neither was it impossible for them to give a view of the interior of the houses; and this was effected, as we shall immediately see by means of the *encyclema*.

But the principal reason for this observance was that publicity, according to the republican notion of the Greeks, was essential to a grave and important transaction. This is clearly proved by the presence of the chorus, whose remaining on many occasions when secret transactions were going on has been judged of according to rules of propriety inapplicable to that country, and most undeservedly censured.

The theatres of the ancients were, in comparison with the small scale of ours, of a colossal magnitude, partly for the sake of containing the whole of the people, with the concourse of strangers who flocked to the festivals, and partly to correspond with the majesty of the dramas represented in them, which required to be seen at a respectful distance. The seats of the spectators consisted of steps which rose backwards round the semicircle of the orchestra,

(called by us the pit,) so that they could all see with equal convenience. The effect of distance was remedied by an artificial heightening of the subject, represented to the eye and ear, produced by means of masks, and contrivances for increasing the loudness of the voice, and the size of the figures. Vitruvius speaks also of vehicles of sound, distributed throughout the building; but the commentators are very much at variance with respect to them. We may without hesitation venture to assume, that the theatres of the ancients were constructed on excellent acoustical principles.

The lowest step of the amphitheatre was still raised considerably above the orchestra, and the stage was placed opposite to it, at an equal degree of elevation. The sunk semicircle of the orchestra contained no spectators, and was destined for another purpose. It was otherwise however with the Romans, but we are not at present considering the distribution of their theatres.

The stage consisted of a strip which stretched from one end of the building to the other, and of which the depth bore little proportion to this breadth. This was called the *logeum*, in Latin *pulpitum*, and the usual place for the persons who spoke was in the middle of it. Behind this middle part, the scene went inwards in a quadrangular form, with less depth, however, than breadth. The space here comprehended was called the *proscenium*. The remaining part of the *logeum*, to the right and left of the scene, had, both before the brink which adjoined the orchestra, and behind, a wall possessing

no scenical decorations, but entirely simple, or at most architecturally ornamented, which was elevated to an equal height with the uppermost steps for the audience.

The decoration was contrived in such a manner, that the principal object in front covered the back ground, and the prospects of distance were given at the two sides, the very reverse of the mode adopted by us. This had also its rules: on the left, appeared the town to which the palace, temple, or whatever occupied the middle, belonged; on the right, the open country, landscape, mountains, sea shore, &c. The lateral decorations were composed of triangles which turned on an axis fastened underneath; and in this manner the change of scene was effected.* In the hindmost decoration it is probable that many things were exhibited in a bodily form which are only painted with us. When a palace or temple was represented, there appeared in the proscenium an altar, which answered a number of purposes in the performance of the pieces.

The decoration was for the most part architectural, but it was also not unfrequently a painted landscape, as in *Prometheus*, when it represented *Caucasus*; or in *Philoctetus*, where the desert

* According to an observation on *Virgil*, by *Servius*, the change of scene was partly produced by revolving, and partly by withdrawing. The former applies to the lateral decorations, and the latter to the middle of the back ground. The partition in the middle opened, disappeared at both sides, and exhibited to view, a new picture. But all the parts of the scene were not always changed at the same time.

island of Lemnos, with its rocks, and his cave were exhibited. It is clear, from a passage of Plato, that the Greeks, in the deceptions of theatrical perspective, carried things much farther than we are disposed to allow from some wretched landscapes discovered in Herculaneum.

In the back wall of the scene there was a large main entrance, and two side entrances. It has been maintained, that from them it might be discovered whether an actor played a principal or under part, as in the first case he came in at the main entrance, and in the second, at the side doors. But this should be understood with the distinction, that it must have been regulated according to the nature of the piece. As the hindmost decoration was generally a palace, in which the principal characters of royal descent resided, they naturally came through the great door, while the servants resided in the wings. There were two other entrances ; the one at the end of the logeum, from whence the inhabitants of the town came ; the other underneath in the orchestra, which was the side for those who had to come from a distance : they ascended a staircase of the logeum opposite to the orchestra, which could be applied to all sorts of purposes according to circumstances. The entrance, therefore, with respect to the lateral decorations, declared the place from whence the players were supposed to come : and it might naturally happen, that the principal characters were in a situation to avail themselves with propriety of the two last mentioned entrances. The situation of these entrances serves to explain many passages in

the ancient dramas, where the persons standing in the middle see some one advancing, long before he approaches them. Beneath the seats of the spectators, a stair was somewhere constructed, which was called the Charonic, and through which the shadows of the departed, without being perceived by the audience, ascended into the orchestra, and then, by the stair which we formerly mentioned, made their appearance on the stage. The nearest brink of the logeum sometimes represented the sea shore. The Greeks were well skilled in availing themselves even of what lay beyond the decoration, and making it subservient to scenical effect. I doubt not, therefore, that in the *Eumenides* the spectators were twice addressed as an assembled people ; first, by Pythia, when she calls upon the Greeks to consult the oracle ; and a second time, when Pallas, by a herald, commands silence throughout the place of judgment. The frequent addresses to heaven were undoubtedly addressed to a real heaven ; and when *Electra* on her first appearance exclaims : “ O holy light, and thou air which fillest the expanse between earth and heaven ! ” she probably turned towards the rising sun. The whole of this procedure is highly deserving of praise ; and though modern critics have censured the mixture of reality and imitation, as destructive of theatrical illusion, this only proves that they have misunderstood the essence of the illusion which can be produced by an artificial representation. If we are to be truly deceived by a picture, that is, if we are to believe in the reality of the object which we see, we must not perceive its limits,

but look at it through an opening; the frame at once declares it for a picture. In scenical decorations we are now unavoidably compelled to make use of architectural contrivances, productive of the same effect as the frames of pictures. It is consequently much better to avoid this, and to renounce the modern illusion, though it may have its advantages, for the sake of extending the view beyond the mere decoration. It was, generally speaking, a principle of the Greeks, that every thing imitated on the stage should, if possible, consist of actual representation; and only where this could not be done were they satisfied with a symbolical exhibition.

The machinery for the descent of gods through the air, or the withdrawing of men from the earth, was placed aloft behind the walls of the two sides of the scene, and consequently removed from the sight of the spectators. Even in the time of *Æschylus*, great use was made of it, as he not only brings *Oceanus* through the air on a griffin, but also introduces the whole choir of ocean nymphs, at least fifteen in number, in a winged chariot. There were hollow places beneath the stage, and contrivances for thunder and lightning, for the apparent fall or burning of a house, &c.

An upper story could be added to the farthest wall of the scene, when they wished to represent a tower with a wide prospect, or any thing similar. The encyclema could be thrust behind the great middle entrance, a machine of a semicircular form within, and covered above, which represented the objects contained in it as in a house. This was

used for producing a great theatrical effect, as we may see from many pieces. The side door of the entrance would naturally be then open, or the curtain which covered it withdrawn.

A stage curtain, which, we clearly see from a description of Ovid, was not dropped, but drawn upwards, is mentioned both by Greek and Roman writers, and the Latin appellation, *aulæum*, is even borrowed from the Greeks. I suspect, however, that the curtain on the Attic stage was not in use at its commencement. In the pieces of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles* the scene is evidently empty at the opening as well as the conclusion, and therefore it did not require any contrivance for preventing the view of the spectators. However, in many of the pieces of *Euripides*, perhaps also in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the stage is at once filled, and represents a standing groupe who could not have been first assembled under the eyes of the spectators. It must be recollected, that it was only the comparatively small *proscenium*, and not the *logeum*, which was covered by the curtain; for, from its great breadth, to have attempted to screen the *logeum* would have been almost impracticable, without answering any good end.

The entrances of the chorus were beneath in the orchestra, in which it generally remained, and in which also it performed its solemn dance, going backwards and forwards during the choral songs. In the front of the orchestra, opposite to the middle of the scene, there was an elevation with steps, resembling an altar, as high as the

stage, which was called *thymele*. This was the station of the chorus when it did not sing, but merely took an interest in the action. The leader of the chorus then took his station on the top of the *thymele*, to see what was passing on the stage, and to communicate with the characters. For though the choral song was common to the whole, yet when it entered into the dialogue one person spoke for the rest; and hence we are to account for the shifting from *thou* to *ye* in addressing them. The *thymele* was situated in the very centre of the building; all the measurements were calculated from it, and the semicircle of the amphitheatre was described round that point. It was, therefore, an excellent contrivance to place the chorus, who were the ideal representatives of the spectators, in the very situation where all the radii were concentrated.

The tragical imitation of the ancients was altogether ideal, and rhythmical; and in forming a judgment of it we must always keep this in view. It was ideal, as its chief object was the highest dignity and sweetness; and rhythmical, as the gestures and inflections of voice were measured in a more solemn manner than in real life. As the plastic art of the Greeks was formed, if we may so express ourselves, with scientific strictness on the most general conception, and embodied into various general characters which were gradually invested with the charms of animation, so that individuality was the last thing to which they turned their attention; in like manner in the mimetic art, their first idea was to exhibit their personages with heroical gran-

dour, a dignity more than human, and an ideal beauty : their second was character ; and the last of all passion, which in the collision was thus forced to give way. The fidelity of the representation was less their object than its beauty: with us it is exactly the reverse. The use of masks, which appears astonishing to us, was not only justifiable on this principle, but absolutely essential ; and far from considering them in the light of a last resource, the Greeks would with justice have considered as a last resource the being obliged to allow a player with vulgar, ignoble, or strongly marked individual features, to represent an Apollo or a Hercules. To them this would have appeared downright profanation. How limited is the power of the most finished actor, in changing the character of his features ! And yet this has the most unfavourable influence on the expression of the passion, as all passion is tinged by the character. Neither are we obliged to have recourse to the conjecture, that they changed the masks in the different scenes, for the purpose of assuming a greater degree of joy or sorrow.* This would by no means have been sufficient, as the passions are often changed in the same scene ; and then modern critics would still be obliged to suppose, that the masks exhibited a different appearance on one side, from what they did on the other, and that that side was turned towards

* I call it conjecture, though Barthelemy, in his *Anacharsis*, considers it a settled point. He cites no authorities, and I do not recollect any.

the spectators which the circumstances of the moment required.* No; the countenance remained from beginning to end the very same, as we may see from the antique masks cut out in stone. For the expression of passion, the motion of the arms and hands, the attitudes, and the tone of the voice, remained to them. We complain of the want of the expression of the face, without reflecting, that at such a great distance its effect would have been lost.

We are not now inquiring whether, without the

* Voltaire, in his Essay on the Tragedy of the Ancients and Moderns, prefixed to Semiramis, has actually gone so far. Amidst a multitude of supposed improprieties which he crowds together to confound the admirers of ancient tragedy, the following is one: *Aucune nation* (that is to say, excepting the Greeks) *ne fait paraître ses acteurs sur des especes d'echasses, le visage couvert d'un masque, qui exprime la douleur d'un côté et la joye de l'autre.* In a conscientious inquiry into the evidence for an assertion so very improbable, and yet so boldly made, I can only find one passage in Quintilian, lib. xi. cap. 3. and an allusion of Platonius still more vague. (Vide *Aristoph. ed. Küster. prolegom.* p. x.) Both passages refer only to the new comedy, and only amount to this, that in some characters the eyebrows were dissimilar. As to the view with which this took place, I shall afterwards say a word or two in considering the new Greek comedy. Voltaire, however, is without excuse, as the mention of the cothurnus leaves no doubt that he alluded to tragic masks. But his error had probably no such learned origin. In most cases, it would be a fruitless task to trace the source of his ignorance. The whole description of the Greek tragedy, as well as that of the cothurnus in particular, is worthy of the man whose knowledge of antiquity was such, that in his Essay on Tragedy, prefixed to Brutus, he boasts of having introduced the Roman Senate on the stage in *red mantles*.

use of masks, it may not be possible to attain a higher degree of separate excellence in the mimetic art. This we would very willingly allow. Cicero, it is true, speaks of the expression, the softness, and delicacy of the acting of Roscius, in the same terms that a modern critic would apply to Garrick or Schröder. But I will not lay any stress on the acting of this celebrated player, the excellence of which has become proverbial, because it appears from a passage in Cicero that he frequently played without a mask, and that this was preferred by his contemporaries. I doubt, however, whether this ever took place among the Greeks. But the same writer relates, that actors in general, for the sake of acquiring the most perfect purity and flexibility of voice, (and not merely the musical voice, otherwise the example would not have been applicable to the orator,) submitted to such a course of uninterrupted exercises as our modern players, even the French who are the strictest in their discipline, would consider a most intolerable oppression. The ancients could show their dexterity in the mimetic art, considered by itself without the accompaniment of words, in their pantomimes, which they carried to a degree of perfection altogether unknown to the moderns. In tragedy, however, the great object in the art was strict subordination; the whole was to appear animated by one spirit, and hence, not merely the poetry, but the musical accompaniment, the scenical decoration and representation, were all the creation of the poet. The player was a mere tool, and his excellency consisted in the accuracy with

which he filled up his part, and by no means in arbitrary bravura, or an ostentatious display of skill.

As from the quality of their writing materials they had not the convenience of many copies, the parts were studied from the repeated delivery of the poet, and the chorus exercised in the same manner. This was called teaching a piece. As the poet was also a musician, and for the most part a player likewise, this must have greatly contributed to the perfection of the representation.

We may safely allow that the task of the modern player, who must change his person without concealing it, is much more difficult; but this difficulty affords us no just criterion for deciding which of the two merits the preference as a representation of the noble and the beautiful.

As the features of the player acquired a more decided expression from the mask, as his voice was strengthened by a contrivance for that purpose, the cothurnus, which consisted of several considerable additions to his soles, as we may see in the ancient statues of Melpomene, raised in like manner his figure considerably above the middle standard. The female parts were also played by men, as the voice and other qualities of women would have conveyed an inadequate idea of the energy of tragic heroines.

The forms of the masks,* and the whole appear-

* We have obtained a knowledge of them from the imitations in stone which have come down to us. They display both beauty and variety. That great variety must have taken place

ance of the tragic figures, we may easily suppose, were sufficiently beautiful and dignified. We should do well to have the ancient sculpture always present to our minds; and the most accurate conception perhaps, that we can possibly have, is to imagine them so many statues in the grand style endowed with life and motion. But, as in sculp-

in the tragical department (in the comic, we can have no doubt about the matter) is evident from the rich store of technical expressions in the Greek language for every gradation of the age, and character of masks. See the *Onomasticon* of Jul. Polux. In the marble masks, however, we can neither see the thinness of the mass from which the real masks were executed, the more delicate colouring, nor the exquisite mechanism of the joinings. The abundance of excellent workmen possessed by Athens, in every thing which had a reference to the plastic arts, will warrant the conjecture that they were in this respect inimitable. Those who have seen the masks of wax in the grand stile, which in some degree contain the whole head, lately contrived at the Roman carnival, may form to themselves a pretty good idea of the theatrical masks of the ancients. They imitate life even to its movements in a most masterly manner, and at such a distance as that from which the ancient players were seen, the deception is most perfect. They always contain the apple of the eye, as we see it in the ancient masks, and the person covered sees merely through the aperture left for the iris. The ancients must have gone still farther, and contrived also an iris for the masks, according to the anecdote of the singer Thamyris, who, in a piece which was probably of Sophocles, made his appearance with a blue and a black eye. Even accidental circumstances were imitated; for instance, the cheeks of Tyro, down which the blood had rolled from the cruel conduct of his step-mother. The head from the mask must no doubt have appeared somewhat large for the rest of the figure; but this disproportion, in tragedy at least, would not be perceived from the elevation of the cothurnus.

ture, they were fond of dispensing as much as possible with dress, for the sake of exhibiting the more essential beauty of the figure; on the stage they would endeavour from an opposite principle to clothe as much as they could well do, both from a regard to decency, and because the actual forms of the body would not correspond sufficiently with the beauty of the countenance. They would also exhibit their divinities, which in sculpture we always observe either entirely naked, or only half covered, in a complete dress. They had recourse to a number of means for giving a suitable strength to the forms of the limbs, and thus restoring proportion to the increased height of the player.

The great breadth of the theatre in proportion to its depth must have given to the grouping of the figures the simple and distinct order of the bas-relief. We prefer on the stage, as well as every where else, groupes of a picturesque description, more crowded, in part covered by themselves, and stretching out into distance; but the ancients were so little fond of foreshortening, that even in their painting they generally avoided it. The gestures accompanied the rhythmus of the declamation, and were intended to display the utmost beauty and sweetness. The poetical conception required a certain degree of repose in the action, and that the whole should be kept in masses, so as to exhibit a succession of plastic attitudes, and it is not improbable that the player remained for some time motionless in the same position. But we are not to suppose from this, that the Greeks were contented

with a cold and spiritless representation of the passions. How could we reconcile such a supposition with the fact, that whole lines of their tragedies are frequently dedicated to inarticulate exclamations of pain, with which we have nothing to correspond in any of our modern languages?

It has been often conjectured that the delivery of their dialogue must have resembled the modern recitative. For this conjecture there is no other foundation than that the Greek, like almost all the southern languages, must have been pronounced with a greater musical inflexion of the voice than our languages of the north. In other respects I conceive that their tragic declamation must have been altogether unlike recitative, much more measured, and far removed from its learned and artificial modulation.

The ancient tragedy has also been frequently compared with the opera, because it was accompanied with music and dancing.* But this betrays the most complete ignorance of the spirit of classical antiquity. Their dancing and music had nothing in common with ours, but the name. In tragedy the chief object was the poetry, and every other thing was strictly subordinate to it. But in the opera the poetry is merely an accessory, the means of connecting the different parts together; and it is almost buried under its associates. The

* Even Bartlemy falls into this error in a note to the 70th Chapter of Anacharsis.

best prescription for the composition of the text of an opera is to give a poetical sketch, which may be afterwards filled up and coloured by the other arts. This anarchy of the arts, where music, dancing, and decoration endeavour to surpass each other by the most profuse display of dazzling charms, constitutes the very essence of the opera. What sort of opera music would it be, where the words should receive a mere rhythmical accompaniment of the simplest modulations? The fantastic magic of the opera consists altogether in the luxurious competition of the different means, and in the perplexity of an overpowering superfluity. This would at once be destroyed by an approximation to the severity of the ancient taste in any one point, even in that of the costume; for the contrast would render the variety in all the other departments quite insupportable. The costume of the opera ought to be dazzling, and overladen with ornaments; and hence many things which have been censured as unnatural, such as exhibiting heroes warbling and trilling in the excess of despondency, are perfectly justifiable. This fairy world is not peopled by real men, but by a singular kind of singing creatures. Neither is it any disadvantage to us that the opera is conveyed, in a language which is not generally understood; the text is altogether lost in the music, and the language the most harmonious and musical, and which contains the greatest number of open vowels, and distinct accents for recitative, is therefore the best. It would

be as absurd to attempt to give to the opera the simplicity of the Grecian tragedy, as it is to declare that there is any resemblance between them.

In the syllabic composition, which then at least prevailed in the Grecian music, the solemn choral song, of which we may form to ourselves some idea from our artless national airs, and more especially those sung in churches, had no other instrumental accompaniment than a single flute, which certainly could not in the slightest degree impair the distinctness of the words. The choruses and lyrical songs, in general, are the part the most difficult to understand of the ancient tragedy, and they must have also been the most difficult to contemporary auditors. They abound with the most involved constructions, the most unusual expressions, and the boldest images and allusions. Why then should the poets have lavished such labour and art on them, if all this labour and art were to be lost in the delivery? Such a display of ornament without aim was very unlike the way of thinking of the Greeks.

In the syllabic measure of their tragedies, there generally prevails a highly finished regularity, which by no means however appears a stiff symmetrical uniformity. Besides the infinite variety of the lyrical strophes, which were always invented by the poet for the occasion, they have also a measure to denote the mental transition from the dialogue to the lyric, the anapest; and two for the dialogue itself, of which the one by far the most

general, the iambic trimeter, denoted the regular progress of the action, and the other, the trochaic tetrameter, was expressive of sudden passion. It would lead us too far into the depths of Greek metres, were we to venture at present on a more minute account of the quality and import of these measures. I merely wished to make this remark, as so much has been said of the simplicity of the ancient tragedy, which in the general plan, at least in the two oldest poets, it is impossible not to allow; but this simplicity is merely applicable to the plan, for the richest variety of poetical ornament is observable in the execution. It must be remembered that the utmost accuracy in the delivery of the different modes of versification was expected from the player, as the delicacy of the Grecian ear would not excuse, even in an orator, the false quantity of a single syllable.

We come now to the essence of the Greek tragedy itself. In stating that the conception was ideal, we are not to understand that the different characters were all morally perfect. In this case what room could there be for such an opposition or conflict, as the plot of a drama requires?—Weaknesses, errors, and even crimes, were portrayed in them, but the manners were always elevated above reality, and every person was invested with such a portion of dignity and grandeur as was compatible with the share which he possessed in the action. The ideality of the representation chiefly consisted in the elevation to a higher sphere. The tragical poetry wished wholly to

separate the image of humanity which it exhibited to us, from the ground of nature to which man is in reality chained down, like a feudal slave. How was this to be accomplished? By exhibiting to us an image hovering in the air? But this would have been incompatible with the law of gravitation and with the earthly materials of which our bodies are framed. Frequently, what we praise in art as ideal is really nothing more. But the production of airy floating shadows can make no durable impression on the mind. The Greeks, however, succeeded in combining in the most perfect manner in their art ideality with reality, or, dropping school terms, an elevation more than human with all the truth of life, and all the energy of bodily qualities. They did not allow their figures to flutter without consistency in empty space, but they fixed the statue of humanity on the eternal and immoveable basis of moral liberty; and that it might stand there unshaken, being formed of stone or brass, or some more solid mass than the living human bodies, it made an impression by its own weight, and from its very elevation and magnificence it was only the more decidedly subjected to the law of gravity.

Inward liberty and external necessity are the two poles of the tragic world. Each of these ideas can only appear in the most perfect manner by the contrast of the other. As the feeling of internal dignity elevates the man above the unlimited dominion of impulse and native instinct, and in a word absolves him from the guardianship of

nature, so the necessity which he must also recognize ought to be no mere natural necessity, but to lie beyond the world of sense in the abyss of infinitude; and it must consequently be represented as the invincible power of fate. Hence it extends also to the world of the gods: for the Grecian gods are mere powers of nature; and although immeasurably higher than mortal man, yet, compared with infinitude, they are on an equal footing with himself. In Homer and the tragedians, the gods are introduced in a manner altogether different. In the former their appearance is arbitrary and accidental, and can communicate no higher interest to the epic poem than the charm of the wonderful. But in tragedy the gods either enter in obedience to fate, and to carry its decrees into execution; or they endeavour in a godlike manner to assert their liberty of action, and appear involved in the same struggles with destiny which man has to encounter.

This is the essence of the tragic in the sense of the ancients. We are accustomed to give to all terrible or sorrowful events the appellation of tragic, and it is certain that such events are selected in preference by tragedy, though a melancholy conclusion is by no means indispensably necessary, and several ancient tragedies, viz. the *Eumenides*, *Philoctetes*, and in some degree also the *Œdipus Colonus*, without mentioning many of the pieces of *Euripides*, have a happy and enlivening termination.

But why does tragedy select those objects which are so dreadfully repugnant to the wishes and the

wants of our sensible nature? This question has often been asked, and seldom answered in a very satisfactory manner. Some have said that the pleasure of such representations arises from the comparison between the calmness and tranquillity of our own situation, and the storms and perplexities to which the victims of passion are exposed. But when we take a warm interest in a tragedy, we cease to think of ourselves; and when this is not the case, it is the best of all proofs that we take but a feeble interest, and that the tragedy has failed in its effect. Others again have had recourse to our feeling for moral improvement, which is gratified by the view of poetical justice in the reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked. But he whom the aspect of such dreadful examples could in reality improve, would be conscious of a sentiment of depression and humiliation, very far removed from genuine morality and elevation of mind. Besides, poetical justice is by no means indispensable in a good tragedy; it may end with the suffering of the just and the triumph of the wicked, when the balance is once restored by the prospect of futurity. Small will be our improvement, if with Aristotle we say that the object of tragedy is to purify the passions by pity and terror. In the first place the commentators have never been able to agree as to the meaning of this proposition, and have had recourse to the most forced explanations. Look for instance into the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing. Lessing gives a new explanation, and conceives he has found in Aristotle a poetical Euclid.

But mathematical demonstrations are subject to no misconception, and geometrical evidence is not applicable to the theory of the fine arts. Supposing however tragedy to operate this moral cure in us, it must do so by the painful feelings of terror and compassion : and it remains to be proved how we should take a pleasure in subjecting ourselves to such an operation.

Others have been pleased to say that we are attracted to theatrical representations from the want of some violent agitation to rouse us out of the torpor of every-day life. I have already acknowledged the existence of this want, when speaking of the attractions of the drama ; and to it we are even to attribute the fights of wild beasts and gladiators among the Romans. But must we who are less indurated, and more inclined to tender feelings, be desirous of seeing demi-gods and heroes descend into the bloody lists of the tragic stage, like so many desperate gladiators, that our nerves may be shaken by the aspect of their sufferings ? No : it is not the aspect of suffering which constitutes the charm of a tragedy, or the amusement of a circus or wild beast fight. In the latter we see a display of activity, strength, and courage, qualities related to the mental and moral powers of man. The satisfaction which we derive from the representation of the powerful situations and overwhelming passions in a good tragedy, must be ascribed either to the feeling of the dignity of human nature, excited by the great models exhibited to us, or to the trace of a higher order of things, impressed on the ap-

parently irregular progress of events, and secretly revealed in them; or to both of these causes together.

The true cause, therefore, why in tragical representations we cannot exclude even that which appears harsh and cruel is, that a spiritual and invisible power can only be measured by the opposition which it encounters from some external force that can be taken in by the senses. The moral freedom of man can therefore only be displayed in a conflict with the impulse of the senses: so long as it is not called into action by a higher power, it is either actually dormant in him, or appears to slumber, as it can fill no part as a mere natural entity. The moral part of our nature can only be preserved amidst struggles and difficulties, and if we were therefore to ascribe a distinctive aim to tragedy, as instructive, it should be this: that all these sufferings must be experienced, and all these difficulties overcome, to establish the claims of the mind to a divine origin, and teach us to estimate the earthly existence as vain and insignificant.

With respect to every thing connected with this point, I refer my hearers to the Section on the *Sublime* in *Kant's Criticism of the Judgment* (*Kritik der Urtheilskraft*), to the complete perfection of which nothing is wanting but a more definite idea of the tragedy of the ancients, with which he does not seem to have been very well acquainted.

I come now to another peculiarity which distinguishes the tragedy of the ancients from ours,

I mean the chorus. We must consider it as the personification of opinion on the action which is going on; the incorporation into the representation itself of the sentiments of the poet, as the interpreter for the whole human race. This is the general poetical character which we must here assign to it, and that character is by no means affected by the circumstance that the chorus had a local origin in the feasts of Bacchus, and that it always had a peculiar national signification with the Greeks. We have already said that, with their republican way of thinking, publicity was considered essential to every important transaction. As in their compositions they went back to the heroic ages, they gave a certain republican cast to the families of their heroes, by carrying on the action either in presence of the elders of the people, or those persons whose characters entitled them to respect. This publicity does not, it is true, correspond with Homer's picture of the manners of the heroic age; but both in the costume and the mythology, the dramatic poetry generally displayed a spirit of independence and conscious liberty.

The chorus was therefore introduced to give the whole that appearance of reality which was most consistent with the fable. Whatever it might be in particular pieces, it represented in general, first the national spirit, and then the general participation of mankind. In a word, the chorus is the ideal spectator. It mitigates the impression of a heart rending or moving story, while it conveys to the

actual spectator a lyrical and musical expression of his own emotions, and elevates him to the region of consideration.

The modern critics have never known what to make of the chorus ; and this is the less to be wondered at, as Aristotle affords no satisfactory solution of the difficulty. The business of the chorus is better painted by Horace, who ascribes to it a general expression of moral participation, instruction and admonition. But the critics in question have either believed that its chief object was to prevent the stage from ever being altogether empty, although the proper place for the chorus was not upon the stage ; or they have censured it as a superfluous and laughable accompaniment, and seemed astonished at the supposed impropriety of carrying on secret transactions in the presence of assembled multitudes. This they consider as the principal reason for the observance of the unity of place, as it could not be changed by the poet, without the dismissal of the chorus, an act which would have required at least some sort of pretext ; they believe that the chorus owed its continuance from the first origin of tragedy merely to accident ; and as it is easy to perceive that in Euripides, the last tragic poet which we have, the choral songs have frequently little or no connexion with the fable, and form a mere episodal ornament, they therefore conclude that the Greeks had only to take one other step in dramatic art, to explode the chorus altogether. To refute these superficial conjectures, it is only necessary to observe, that Sophocles wrote

a Treatise on the Chorus, in prose, in opposition to the principles of some other poets, and that far from following blindly the practice which he found established, like an intelligent artist, he could assign reasons for the system which he adopted.

Modern poets of the very first rank, since the revival of the study of the ancients, have often attempted to introduce the chorus in their pieces, for the most part without a correct, and always without a vivid idea of its destination. But we have no suitable singing or dancing, neither have we, as our theatres are constructed, any place for it; and it will hardly ever succeed, therefore, in becoming naturalized with us.

The Greek tragedy, in its pure and unaltered state, will always for our theatres remain an exotic plant, which we can hardly hope to cultivate with any success, even in the hot-house of learned art and criticism. The Grecian mythology, which constitutes the materials of ancient tragedy, is as foreign to the minds and imaginations of most of the spectators, as its form and mode of representation. But to endeavour to constrain another subject, a historical one for example, to assume that form, must always be a most unprofitable and hopeless attempt.

I have called mythology the chief materials of tragedy. We know, indeed, of two historical tragedies, by Grecian authors: the *Capture of Miletus*, of Phrynichus, and the *Persians*, of Æschylus, a piece which still exists; but these singular exceptions, both belonging to an epoch when the art

had not attained its full maturity, among so many hundred examples of a different description, serve to establish more strongly the truth of the rule. The sentence passed by the Athenians on Phrynichus, whom they subjected to a pecuniary fine because, in the representation of contemporary calamities which with due caution they might have avoided, he had agitated them in too violent a manner, however hard and arbitrary it may appear in a judicial point of view, displays however a correct feeling with respect to the subject and the limits of art. The mind suffering under the near reality of the subject cannot possess the necessary repose and self-possession which are necessary for the reception of pure tragical impressions. The heroic fables, on the other hand, appear always at a certain distance, and in the light of the wonderful. The wonderful possesses the advantage of being believed, and in some degree disbelieved, at the same time: believed in so far as it is founded on the connexion with other opinions; disbelieved while we never take such an immediate interest in it as we do in what wears the hue of the every day life of our own age. The Grecian mythology was a web of national and local traditions, held in equal honour as a part of religion and as an introduction to history; every where preserved in full life among the people by customs and monuments, and by the numberless works of epic and mythical poets. The tragedians had only therefore to engraft one species of poetry on another: they were always allowed the use of certain established fables, invaluable for their

dignity, grandeur, and remoteness from all accessory ideas of a petty description. Every thing, down to the very errors and weaknesses of that departed race of heroes who claimed their descent from the gods, was consecrated in the eyes of the people. Those heroes were painted as beings endowed with more than human strength ; but, so far from possessing unerring virtue and wisdom, they were also represented as under the dominion of furious and unbridled passions. It was a wild age of effervescence : the cultivation of social order had not as yet rendered the soil of morality arable, and it yielded at the same time the most beneficent and poisonous productions, with the fresh and luxuriant fulness of a creative nature. Here the monstrous and ferocious were not a necessary indication of that degradation and corruption with which they are necessarily associated under the developement of law and order, and which fill us with sentiments of horror and aversion. The criminals of the fabulous ages are not, if we may be allowed the expression, amenable to the tribunals of men, but consigned over to a higher jurisdiction. Some are of opinion that the Greeks, in their republican zeal, took a particular pleasure in witnessing the representation of the outrages and consequent calamities of the different royal families, and are almost disposed to consider the ancient tragedy, in general, as a satire on monarchical government. This party view would, however, have deadened the interest of the audience, and consequently destroyed the effect which it was the aim of the tragedy to produce.

But we must remark, that the royal families, whose crimes and misfortunes afforded the most abundant materials for tragical pictures of a horrible description, were the Pelopidæ of Mycenæ, and the Labdacidæ of Thebes, families which were foreign to the Athenians, for whom the pieces were composed. We do not see that the Attic poets endeavoured to exhibit the ancient kings of their country in an odious light; on the contrary, they always hold up their national hero, Theseus, for public admiration, as a model of justice and moderation, the champion of the oppressed, the first lawgiver, and even the founder of their liberty; and it was one of their favourite modes of flattering the people, to persuade them that, even in the heroic ages, Athens was distinguished above all the other states of Greece, for obedience to the laws, humanity, and a knowledge of the rights of nations. The general revolution, by which the independent kingdoms of ancient Greece were converted into a community of free states, had separated the heroic age from the age of social cultivation, by a wide interval, beyond which the genealogy of a very few families only was attempted to be traced. This was extremely advantageous for the ideal elevation of the characters of their tragedy, as few human things will admit of a close inspection into them, without betraying their imperfections. But in the very different relations of the age in which those heroes lived, the standard of mere civil and domestic morality was not applicable, and the feeling must go back to the primary ingredients of humanity. Before the

existence of constitutions,—before the proper development of law and right, the sovereigns and rulers were their own lawgivers in a world not yet subjected to order ; and the fullest scope was thus given to the dominion of will, for good and for bad purposes. Hereditary rule, therefore, exhibited more striking instances of sudden changes of fortune than the later times of political equality. In these respects the high rank of the principal characters was essential, or at least favourable, to tragic representation, and not because, according to the idea of some moderns, those only who can occasion the happiness or misery of numbers are sufficiently important to interest us in their behalf, nor because internal elevation of sentiment must be clothed with external dignity, to claim our honour and admiration. The Greek tragedians paint the downfall of kingly houses without any reference to the condition of the people ; they show us the man in the king, and, far from veiling their heroes from our sight in their purple mantles, they allow us to look through their vain splendour, into a bosom torn and harrowed up by passions. That the regal pomp was not so necessary as the heroic costume is evident, not only from the practice of the ancients, but from the tragedies of the moderns having a reference to the throne, produced under different circumstances, namely, the existence of monarchical government. They dare not draw from existing reality, for nothing is less suitable for tragedy than a court, and a court life. Where they do not therefore paint an ideal kingdom with distant manners, they fall into

stiffness and formality, which are much more destructive to freedom and boldness of character, and to deep pathos, than the narrow circle of private life.

A few mythological fables only seem originally marked out for tragedy: such, for example, as the long-continued alternation of aggressions, vengeance, and maledictions, which we witness in the house of Atreus. When we examine the names of the pieces which are lost, we have great difficulty in conceiving how the mythological fables on which they are founded, as they are known to us, could afford sufficient materials for the developement of an entire tragedy. It is true, the poets, in the various relations of the same story, had a great amplitude of selection; and this very variety justified them in going still farther, and making considerable alterations in the circumstances of an event, so that the inventions added to one piece sometimes contradict the accounts given by the same poet in another. We are, however, principally to ascribe the productiveness of mythology, for the tragic art, to the principle which we observe so powerful throughout the whole historical range of Grecian cultivation; namely, that the power which preponderated for the time assimilated every thing to itself. As the heroic fables, in all their deviations, were easily developed into the tranquil fulness and light variety of epic poetry, they were afterwards adapted to the object which the tragedians proposed to accomplish, by earnestness, energy, and compression; and what in this change of destination appeared inapplicable

to tragedy still afforded materials for a sort of half sportive, though ideal representation, in the subordinate walk of the *satirical drama*.

I shall be forgiven, I hope, if I attempt to illustrate the above reflections on the essence of the ancient tragedy, by a comparison borrowed from the plastic arts, which will, I trust, be found somewhat more than a mere fanciful allusion.

The Homeric epic is, in poetry, what half-raised workmanship is in sculpture, and tragedy the distinctly separated groupe.

The poem of Homer sprung from the soil of the traditionary tale, is not yet purified from it, as the figures of a bas-relief are borne by a back ground which is foreign to them. These figures appear depressed, and in the epic poem all is painted as past and remote. In the bas relief they are generally thrown into profile, and in the epic characterized in the most artless manner: they are, in the former, not properly grouped, but follow one another; and the Homeric heroes, in like manner, advance singly in succession before us. It has been remarked that the Iliad is not definitively closed, but that we are left to suppose something both to precede and to follow. The bas-relief is equally boundless, and may be continued *ad infinitum*, either from before or behind, on which account the ancients preferred the selection of those objects for it, which admitted of an indefinite extension, as the trains at sacrifices, dances, and rows of combatants, &c. Hence they also exhibited bas-reliefs on round surfaces, such as vases, or the frieze of a rotunda,

where the two ends are withdrawn from our sight by the curvature, and where, on our advancing, one object appears as another disappears. The reading of the Homeric poetry very much resembles such a circumgiration, as the present object alone arrests our attention, while that which precedes and follows is allowed to disappear.

But in the distinctly formed groupe, as in tragedy, sculpture and poetry bring before our eyes an independent and definite whole. To separate it from natural reality, the former places it on a base, as on an ideal ground. It also removes as much as possible all foreign and accidental accessories, that the eye may wholly rest on the essential objects, the figures themselves. These figures are wrought into the most complete rounding, yet they refuse the illusion of colours, and announce by the purity and uniformity of the mass of which they are constructed, a creation not endowed with perishable life, but of a higher and more elevated character.

Beauty is the object of sculpture, and repose is most advantageous for the display of beauty. Repose alone, therefore, is suitable to the figure. But a number of figures can only be connected together and grouped by one action. The groupe represents beauty in motion, and the object of it is to combine both in the highest degree. This can only be effected when the artist finds means, in the most violent bodily or mental anguish, to moderate the expression by manly resistance, calm grandeur, or inherent sweetness, in such a manner that, with the most moving truth, the features of beauty shall yet

in nowise be disfigured. The observation of Winkelmann on this subject is inimitable. He says that beauty with the ancients was the tongue on the balance of expression, and in this sense the groupes of Niobe and Laocoön are master-pieces; the one in the sublime and serious, the other in the learned and ornamental style.

The comparison with ancient tragedy is the more apposite here, as we know that both Æschylus and Sophocles produced a Niobe, and that Sophocles was also the author of a Laocoön. In Laocoön the conflicting sufferings and anguish of the body, and the resistance of the soul, are balanced with the most wonderful equilibrium. The children calling for help, tender objects of our compassion, and not of our admiration, draw us back to the appearance of the father, who seems to turn his eyes in vain to the gods. The convolving serpents exhibit to us the inevitable destiny which unites together the characters in so dreadful a manner. And yet the beauty of proportion, the delightful flow of the attitude, are not lost in this violent struggle; and a representation the most frightful to the senses is yet treated with a degree of moderation, while a mild breath of sweetness is diffused over the whole.

In the groupe of Niobe there is also the most perfect mixture of terror and pity. The upturned looks of the mother, and the mouth half open in supplication, seem to accuse the invisible wrath of Heaven. The daughter, clinging in the agonies of death to the bosom of her mother, in her infantine

innocence can have no other fear than for herself: the innate impulse of self preservation was never represented in a manner more tender and affecting. Can there on the other hand be exhibited to the senses a more beautiful image of self-devoting heroic magnanimity than Niobe, as she bends her body forwards, that if possible she may alone receive the destructive bolt? Pride and repugnance are melted down in the most ardent maternal love. The more than earthly dignity of the features are the less disfigured by pain, as from the quick repetition of the shocks she appears, as in the fable, to have become insensible and motionless. But before this figure, twice transformed into stone, and yet so inimitably animated,—before this line of demarcation of all human suffering, the most callous beholder is dissolved in tears.

In all the agitation produced by the sight of these groupes, there is still somewhat in them which invites us to composed contemplation; and in the same manner, the tragedy of the ancients leads us, even in the course of the representation, to the most elevated reflections on our existence, and those mysteries in our destiny which can never wholly be explained.

LECTURE IV.

Progress of the tragic art among the Greeks.—Their different styles.—Æschylus.—Connexion in a trilogy of Æschylus.—His remaining works.—Life and poetical character of Sophocles.—Character of his different tragedies.

OF the inexhaustible stores possessed by the Greeks in the department of tragedy, which the public competition at the Athenian festivals called into being, as the rival poets always contended for a prize, very little indeed has come down to us. We only possess works of three of their numerous tragedians, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and these in no proportion to the number of their compositions. The three authors in question were selected by the Alexandrian critics as the foundation for the study of ancient Grecian literature, not because they alone were deserving of estimation, but because they afforded the best illustration of the various styles of tragedy. Of each of the two oldest poets, we have seven remaining pieces; in these however we have, according to the testimony of the ancients, several of their most distinguished productions. Of Euripides we have a much greater number, and we might well exchange many of them for other works which are now lost; for example, the satirical dramas of Achæus, Æschylus, and Sophocles, several pieces of Phrynichus for the sake of compa-

rison with Æschylus, or of Agathon, whom Plato describes as effeminate, but sweet and affecting, and who was a contemporary of Euripides though somewhat younger.

We leave to antiquarians the car of the strolling Thespis, the competition for a he-goat, from which the name of tragedy was derived, the visages of the first improvisatoré actors smeared over with lees, that they may ascertain the rude beginnings from which Æschylus, by one gigantic stride, gave that dignified character to tragedy under which it appears in his works, and shall proceed immediately to the consideration of the poets themselves.

The tragic style (giving to the word style the sense which it receives in the plastic arts, and not the exclusive signification in writing) of Æschylus is grand, severe, and not unfrequently hard : in the style of Sophocles we observe the most complete proportion and harmonious sweetness : the style of Euripides is soft and luxuriant ; extravagant in his easy fulness, he sacrifices the general effect to brilliant passages. From the analogy which the undisturbed developement of the fine arts among the Greeks every where offers to us, we may compare the epochs of tragic art to those of sculpture. Æschylus is the Phidias of the tragic art, Sophocles the Polycletus, and Euripides the Lysippus. Phidias formed sublime images of the gods, but he was still attached to the extrinsic magnificence of materials ; and he surrounded their majestic repose with images of the most violent struggles. Polycletus carried the art to perfection, and hence one of his statues

was called the rule of beauty. Lysippus distinguished himself by the fire of his works; but in his time sculpture had deviated from its original destination, and was much more desirous of expressing the charm of motion and life than of adhering to ideality of form.

Æschylus is to be considered as the creator of tragedy, which sprung from him completely armed, like Pallas from the head of Jupiter. He clothed it in a state of suitable dignity, and gave it an appropriate place of exhibition; he was the inventor of scenic pomp, and not only instructed the chorus in singing and dancing, but appeared himself in the character of a player. He was the first who gave developement to the dialogue, and limits to the lyrical part of the tragedy, which still however occupies too much space in his pieces. He draws his characters with a few bold and strongly marked features. The plans are simple in the extreme: he did not understand the art of enriching and varying an action, and dividing its developement and catastrophe into parts, bearing a due proportion to each other. Hence his action often stands still, and this circumstance becomes still more apparent, from the undue extension of his choral songs. But all his poetry betrays a sublime and serious mind. Terror is his element, and not the softer affections; he holds up the head of Medusa to his astonished spectators. His manner of treating fate is austere in the extreme: he suspends it over the heads of mortals in all its gloomy majesty. The cothurnus of Æschylus has as it were an iron weight: gi-

gantic figures alone stalk before our eyes. It seems as if it required an effort in him, to condescend to paint mere men to us: he abounds most in the representation of gods, and seems to dwell with particular delight in exhibiting the Titans, those ancient gods who signify the dark powers of primitive nature, and who had long been driven into Tartarus beneath a better regulated world. He endeavours to swell out his language to a gigantic sublimity, corresponding with the standard of his characters. Hence he abounds in harsh combinations and overstrained epithets, and the lyrical parts of his pieces are often obscure in the extreme, from the involved nature of the construction. He resembles Dante and Shakspeare in the very singular cast of his images and expressions. These images are nowise deficient in the terrible graces, which almost all the writers of antiquity celebrate in Æschylus.

Æschylus flourished in the very first vigour of the Grecian freedom, after its successful struggle, and he seems to have been thoroughly imbued with a proud feeling of the superiority which this struggle reflected on the nation to which he belonged. He was an eye-witness of the greatest and most glorious event in the history of Greece, the overthrow and annihilation of the Persian hosts under Darius and Xerxes, and had fought in the memorable battles of Marathon and Salamis with distinguished bravery. In the *Persians* he has, in an indirect manner, sung the triumph which he contributed to obtain, while he paints the downfall of the Persian projects, and the ignominious return of the fugitive monarch

to his royal residence. He describes in the most vivid and glowing colours the battle of Salamis. In this piece, and in the *Seven before Thebes*, a war-like vein gushes forth; the personal inclination of the poet for the life of a hero shines throughout with the most dazzling lustre. It was well remarked by Gorgias, the sophist, that Mars, instead of Bacchus, dictated this last drama; for Bacchus, and not Apollo, was the patron of tragic poets, which may appear somewhat singular on a first view of the matter, but then we must recollect that Bacchus was not merely the god of wine and joy, but also the god of the highest degree of inspiration.

Among the remaining pieces of Æschylus, we have what is highly deserving of our attention, a complete trilogy. The antiquarian account of trilogies is this, that in the more early times the poet did not contend for the prize with a single piece, but with three, which however were not always connected together by their contents, and that a fourth satirical drama was also attached to them. All these were successively represented in one day. The idea which we must form of the trilogy in relation to the tragic art is this: a tragedy cannot be indefinitely lengthened and continued, like the Homeric epic poem for example, to which whole rhapsodies have been appended; for this is too independent and complete within itself. Notwithstanding this circumstance, however, several tragedies may be connected together by means of a common destiny running throughout all their actions in one great cycle. Hence the fixing on the num-

ber three admits of a satisfactory explanation. It is the thesis, the antithesis, and the connexion. The advantage of this conjunction was that, in the consideration of the connected fables, a more ample degree of gratification was derived than could possibly be obtained from a single action. The objects of the three tragedies might be separated by a wide interval of time, or follow close upon one another.

The three pieces of the trilogy of Æschylus are *Agamemnon*, the *Choephoræ* or *Electra*, and the *Eumenides* or *Furies*. The object of the first is the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, on his return from Troy. In the second, Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother: *facto pius et sceleratus eodem*. This deed, although perpetrated from the most powerful motives, is repugnant however to natural and moral order. Orestes as a Prince was, it is true, entitled to exercise justice even on the members of his own family; but he was under the necessity of stealing in disguise into the dwelling of the tyrannical usurper of his throne, and of going to work like an assassin. The memory of his father pleads his excuse; but although Clytemnestra has deserved death, the blood of his mother still rises up in judgment against him. This is represented in the *Eumenides* in the form of a contention among the Gods, some of whom approve of the deed of Orestes, while others persecute him, till at last the divine wisdom, under the figure of Minerva, reconciles the opposite claims, establishes a peace, and puts an end to the long series of crimes and punishments which desolated the royal house of Atreus.

A considerable interval takes place between the period of the first and second pieces, during which Orestes grows up to manhood. The second and third are connected together immediately in the order of time. Orestes takes flight after the murder of his mother to Delphi, where we find him at the commencement of the *Eumenides*.

In each of the two first pieces, there is a visible reference to the one which follows. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra and the chorus prophesy, at the close, to the arrogant Clytemnestra and her paramour *Ægisthus*, the punishment which awaits them at the hands of Orestes. In the *Choephoræ*, Orestes, immediately after the execution of the deed, finds no longer any repose; the furies of his mother begin to persecute him, and he announces his resolution of taking refuge in Delphi.

The connexion is therefore evident throughout, and we may consider the three pieces, which were connected together even in the representation, as so many acts of one great and entire drama. I mention this as a preliminary justification of Shakspeare and other modern poets, in connecting together in one representation a larger circle of human destinies, as we can produce to the critics who object to this the supposed example of the ancients.

In *Agamemnon* it was the intention of *Æschylus* to exhibit us a sudden fall from the highest pinnacle of prosperity and fame, into the abyss of ruin. The prince, the hero, the general of the whole of the Greeks, in the very moment when he has succeeded in concluding the most glorious

action, the destruction of Troy, the fame of which is to be re-echoed from the mouths of the greatest poets of all ages, on entering the threshold of his house, after which he has long sighed, is strangled amidst the unsuspected preparations for a festival, according to the expression of Homer, "like an ox in the stall," strangled by his faithless wife; her unworthy seducer takes possession of his throne, and the children are consigned to banishment, or to hopeless servitude.

With the view of giving the greater effect to this dreadful alternation of fortune, the poet has previously thrown a splendour over the destruction of Troy. He has done this in the first half of the piece in a manner peculiar to himself, which, however singular, must be allowed to be impressive in the extreme, and to lay fast hold of the imagination. It is of importance to Clytemnestra not to be surprised by the arrival of her husband. She has therefore arranged an uninterrupted series of signal fires from Troy to Mycenæ to announce to her that great event. The piece commences with the speech of a watchman, who supplicates the gods for a release from his toils, as for ten long years he has been exposed to the cold dews of night, has witnessed the various changes of the stars, and looked in vain for the expected signal; at the same time he sighs in secret for the internal ruin of the royal house. At this moment he sees the blaze of the long wished-for fires, and hastens to announce it to his mistress. A chorus of aged persons appears, and in their songs they trace back the Trojan

war, throughout all its eventful changes of fortune from its first origin, and recount all the prophecies relating to it, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia, at the expense of which the voyage of the Greeks was purchased. Clytemnestra declares the joyful cause of the sacrifice which she orders, and the herald Talthybius immediately makes his appearance, who as an eye-witness announces the drama of the conquered and plundered city consigned as a prey to the flames, the joy of the victors, and the glory of their leader. He displays with reluctance, as if unwilling to shade the brilliancy of his picture, the subsequent misfortunes of the Greeks, their dispersion, and the shipwreck suffered by many of them, an immediate symptom of the wrath of the Gods. We easily see how little the unity of place was observed by the poet, and that he rather avails himself of the prerogative of his mental dominion over the powers of nature, and adds wings to the circling hours in their course towards their dreadful goal. Agamemnon now comes, borne in a sort of triumphal procession; and seated on another car, laden with booty, follows Cassandra, his prisoner of war and mistress, according to the privilege of the heroes of those days. Clytemnestra greets him with hypocritical joy and veneration; she orders her slaves to cover the ground with the most costly embroideries of purple, that it might not be touched by the foot of the conqueror. Agamemnon, with sage moderation refuses to receive an honour due only to the gods; at last he yields to their invitations, and enters the house. The chorus then

begins to utter dark forebodings. Clytemnestra returns to allure Cassandra to her destruction by the art of soft persuasion. The latter remains dumb and motionless, but the queen is hardly gone, when, seized with a prophetic rage, she breaks out into the most perplexing lamentations, afterwards unveils her prophecies more distinctly to the chorus; she sees in her mind all the enormities which have been perpetrated in that house; the repast of Thyestes, which the sun refused to look on: the shadows of the dilacerated children appear to her on the battlements of the palace. She also sees the death prepared for her master, and although horror-struck at the atrocious spectacle, as if seized with an overpowering fury, she rushes into the house to meet her inevitable death; we then hear behind the scene the sighs of the dying Agamemnon. The palace opens; Clytemnestra stands beside the body of her king and husband, an undaunted criminal, who not only confesses the deed, but boasts of it as a just requital for Agamemnon's ambitious sacrifice of Iphigenia. The jealousy towards Cassandra, and the criminal union with the unworthy Ægisthus, which is first disclosed after the completion of the murder towards the conclusion of the piece, are motives which she throws entirely into the back ground, and hardly touches on: this was necessary to preserve the dignity of the object. But Clytemnestra would have been improperly portrayed as a weak woman seduced from her duty; she appeared with the features of that heroic age so rich in bloody catastrophes, in which all the passions

were violent, and in which, both in good and evil, men exceeded the ordinary standard of later and more puny ages. What is so revolting, what affords such a deep proof of the degeneracy of human nature, as the spectacle of horrid crimes conceived in a pusillanimous bosom? When such crimes are to be portrayed by the poet, he must neither endeavour to embellish them, nor to mitigate our horror and aversion. The consequence which is thus given to the sacrifice of Iphigenia has this particular advantage, that it keeps within some bounds our discontent at the fall of Agamemnon. He cannot be pronounced wholly innocent; an earlier crime recoils on his own head; and besides, according to the religious idea of the ancients, an old curse hung over his house: Ægisthus, the contriver of his destruction, is a son of that very Thyestes on whom his father Atreus took such an unnatural revenge; and this fatal connexion is conveyed to our minds in the most vivid manner by the chorus, and more especially by the prophecies of Cassandra.

I pass over the subsequent piece of the *Choephoræ* for the present; I shall speak of it when I come to institute a comparison between the manner in which the three poets have handled the same subject.

The fable of the *Eumenides* is, as I have already said, the justification and absolution of Orestes from his bloody crime: it is a trial, but a trial where the gods are accusers, and defenders, and judges; and the manner in which the subject is treated corresponds with its majesty and importance. The scene itself brought before the eyes of the Greeks

the highest objects of veneration which were known to them.

It opens before the celebrated temple at Delphi, which occupies the back ground ; the aged Pythia enters in sacerdotal pomp, addresses her prayers to all the gods who presided, or still preside, over the oracle, harangues the assembled people (the actual), and goes into the temple to seat herself on the tripod. She returns full of consternation, and describes what she has seen in the temple : a man stained with blood, supplicating protection, surrounded by sleeping women with serpent hair ; she then makes her exit by the same entrance. Apollo now appears with Orestes in his traveller's garb, and a sword and olive branch in his hands. He promises him his farther protection, commands him to flee to Athens, and recommends him to the care of the present but invisible Mercury, to whom travellers, and especially those who were under the necessity of concealing their journey, were usually consigned.

Orestes goes off at the side allotted to strangers ; Apollo re-enters the temple, which remains open, and the furies are seen in the interior sleeping on their seats. Clytemnestra now ascends by the charonic stairs through the orchestra, and appears on the stage. We are not to suppose her a haggard skeleton, but a figure with the appearance of life, though paler, still bearing her wounds in her breast, and shrouded in ethereal-coloured vestments. She calls repeatedly to the Furies in the language of vehement reproach, and then disappears, probably through

a trap-door. The Furies awake, and when they no longer find Orestes, they dance in wild commotion round the stage during the choral song. Apollo returns from the temple, and expels them from his sanctuary as profanatory beings. We may here suppose him appearing with the sublime displeasure of the Apollo of the Vatican, with bow and quiver, or clothed in his sacred tunic and chlamys.

The scene now changes ; but as the Greeks on such occasions were fond of going the shortest way to work, the back ground remained probably unchanged, and had now to represent the temple of Minerva, on the hill of Mars (Areopagus), and the lateral decorations would be converted into Athens and the surrounding landscape. Orestes comes as from another land, and embraces as a suppliant the statue of Pallas placed before the temple. The chorus (who, according to the directions of the poet, were clothed in black, with purple girdles, and serpents in their hair, the masks with something of the terrible beauty of Medusa heads, and even the age marked on plastic principles) follow him on foot to this place, but remain throughout the remainder of the piece beneath in the orchestra. The Furies had at first exhibited the rage of beasts of prey at the escape of their booty, but they now sing with tranquil dignity their high and terrible office among mortals, claim the head of Orestes as forfeited to them, and consecrate it with mysterious charms of endless pain. Pallas, the warlike virgin, appears in a chariot and four at the intercession of the suppliant. She listens with

calm dignity to to the mutual complaints of Orestes and his adversaries, and finally undertakes, after due reflection, the office of umpire at the solicitation of the two parties. The assembled judges take their seats on the steps of the temple, the herald commands silence among the people by sound of trumpet, as at an actual tribunal. Apollo advances to advocate the cause of the youth; the Furies in vain oppose his interference, and the arguments for and against the deed are gone through in short speeches. The judges throw their calculi into the urn, Pallas throws in a white one; all are wrought up to the highest pitch of expectation; Orestes calls out full of anguish to his protector:

O Phœbus Apollo, how is the cause decided?

The Furies on the other hand:

O black night, mother of all things, dost thou behold this?

In the enumeration of the black and white pebbles, they are found equal in number, and the accused is therefore declared by Pallas acquitted of the charge. He breaks out into joyful expressions of thanks, while the Furies on the other hand declaim against the arrogance of the young gods, who take such liberties with the race of Titan. Pallas bears their rage with equanimity, addresses them in the language of kindness, and even of veneration; and these beings, so untractable in their general disposition, are unable to withstand the power of her mild and convincing eloquence. They promise to

bless the land over which she has dominion, while Pallas assigns them a sanctuary in the Attic territory, where they are to be called the *Eumenides*, that is, the benevolent. The whole ends with a solemn procession round the theatre, with songs of invocation, while bands of children, women, and old men, in purple robes and with torches in their hands, accompany the Furies in their exit.

Let us now take a retrospective view of the whole trilogy. In *Agamemnon* we observe in the deed which is planned and executed, the greatest display of arbitrary will and power: the principal character is a great criminal; and the piece ends with the revolting impressions produced by the sight of triumphant tyranny and crime. I have already alluded to the circumstance of a previous destiny.

The deed in the *Choephoræ* is partly recommended by Apollo as appointment of fate, and partly originates in natural motives: the desire of avenging the father, and the fraternal love for the oppressed Electra. After the deed the struggle between the most sacred feelings first becomes manifest, and allows no repose to the distracted youth.

From the very commencement, the *Eumenides* stands on the very highest tragical elevation: all the past is concentrated as it were in one focus. Orestes has merely been the passive instrument of fate; and free agency is transferred to the more elevated sphere of the gods. Pallas is properly the principal character. The opposition between the most sacred relations, which frequently appears beyond

the power of mortal solution, is represented as a contention in the world of the gods.

And this leads me to the deep import of the whole. The ancient mythology is in general symbolical, although not allegorical; for the two are quite distinct. Allegory is the personification of an idea, a fable solely undertaken with such a view; but that is symbolical which has been created by the imagination for other purposes, or which has a reality in itself independent of the idea, but which at the same time is easily susceptible of a symbolical explanation; and even of itself suggests it.

The Titans, in general, mean the dark primary powers of nature and of mind; the later gods, what enters more within the circle of consciousness. The former are more nearly related to original chaos, the latter belong to a world already subjected to order. The Furies are the dreadful powers of conscience, in so far as it rests on obscure feelings and forebodings, and yields to no principles of reason. In vain Orestes dwells on the just motives for the deed, the voice of blood resounds in his ear. Apollo is the god of youth, of the noble ebullition of passionate discontent, of the bold and daring action: hence this deed was commanded by him. Pallas is cool wisdom, justice, and moderation, which alone can allay the dispute.

Even the sleep of the Furies in the temple is symbolical; for only in the holy place, in the bosom of religion, can the fugitive find rest from the stings of his conscience. Scarcely however has he again ventured into the world, when the image of his

murdered mother appears, and again awakes them. The very speech of Clytemnestra is symbolical, as well as the attributes of the Furies, the serpents, and the sucking of blood. The same may be said of the aversion of Apollo for them; in fact this symbolical application runs throughout the whole.—The equal cogency of the motives for and against the deed is denoted by the divided number of the judges. When at last a sanctuary is allotted to the softened Furies in the Athenian territory, this is as much as to say that reason shall not every where assert her power against the instinctive impulse, that there are certain boundaries in the human mind which are not to be passed, and which every person possessed of a sentiment of reverence will beware of touching, if he wishes to preserve inward peace.

So much for the deep philosophical import, which we are not to wonder at finding in this poet, who, according to the testimony of Cicero, was a Pythagorean. Æschylus had also his political views. The first of these was the rendering Athens illustrious. Delphi was the religious centre of Greece, and yet how it is thrown into the shade! It can only shelter Orestes from the first onset of persecution, but not afford him a complete freedom; this is reserved for the land where law and humanity flourish. His principal object however was the recommending as essential to the welfare of Athens the Areopagus,* an uncorruptible yet mild tribunal,

* I do not find that this aim has ever been ascribed to Æschylus by the express testimony of any ancient writer. It is

in which the white pebble of Pallas in favour of the accused is an invention which does honour to the humanity of the Athenians. The poet shows us the origin of an institution fraught with blessings to humanity, in an immense circle of crimes.

But it will be asked, are not aims of this description prejudicial to the pure poetical impression which the whole ought to produce? Most undoubtedly, in the manner in which other poets, and especially Euripides, have proceeded in such cases. But in *Æschylus* the aim is much more subservient to the poetry than the poetry to the aim. He does not lower himself to a circumscribed reality, but elevates it on the contrary to a higher sphere, and connects it with the most sublime conceptions.

however not to be mistaken, especially in the speech of Pallas, beginning with the 680th verse. This coincides with the account that in the very year when the piece was represented, Olymp. lxxx. 1. a certain Ephialtes excited the people against the Areopagus, which was the best guardian of the old and more austere constitution, and kept democratic extravagance in check. This Ephialtes was murdered one night by an unknown hand. *Æschylus* received the first prize in the theatrical games, but we know at the same time that he left Athens immediately afterwards, and passed his remaining years in Sicily. It is possible that, although the theatrical judges did him the justice to which he was entitled, he might be held in aversion by the multitude notwithstanding, and that this without any express sentence of banishment might have induced him to leave his native city. The story of the sight of the terrible chorus of Furies having thrown children into mortal convulsions, and caused women to miscarry, appears to me fabulous. A poet would hardly have been crowned, who had been the occasion of profaning the festival by such occurrences.

In the *Orestiad* (for so the three connected pieces are called) we certainly possess one of the most sublime poems that ever was conceived by the human imagination, and probably the most mature and faultless of all the productions of his genius. The period of their composition confirms this supposition; for he was at least sixty years of age when he brought these dramas on the stage, the last which he ever submitted in competition for the prize at Athens. Every one of his pieces however which have come down to us is remarkable either for the display of some peculiar property of the poet, or as indicative of the step in the art on which he stood at the time.

I should be disposed to consider the *Suppliants* one of his more early works. It probably stood in a trilogy between two other tragedies on the same subject, the names of which are still preserved, namely the *Egyptians* and the *Danaidæ*. The first describes the flight of the *Danaidæ* from Egypt to avoid the marriage with their uncles, whom they detested; the second the protection which they sought and obtained in Argos; the third the murder of the husbands whom they were compelled to receive. We are disposed to view the contents of the two first pieces, as mere detached scenes, and introductions to the tragical action which first properly commences in the last. But tragedy on this footing was as complete, considered as one whole, as the single pieces were defective from the necessity of being taken in connexion with others. In the *Suppliants* the chorus not only takes a part

in the action as in the *Eumenides*, but it is even the principal character towards whom our interest is directed. This modification of tragedy is neither favourable for the display of peculiarity of character, nor the exciting an interest by means of powerful passions; or to speak in the language of Grecian art it is neither advantageous for *ethos* nor for *pathos*. The chorus has but one voice and one soul: the dispositions common to fifty young women (for the chorus of Danaidæ certainly amounted to this number) would have been placed by the display of an exclusive peculiarity in opposition with the nature of things; and therefore such a multitude could only be painted with the common features of humanity, those common to their sex and age, and those of their nation. In this last respect the will of Æschylus is more conspicuous than his performance: he lays a great stress on the foreign race of the Danaidæ; but this they only declare themselves, without allowing the foreign character to be discovered from their discourse.—The sentiments, resolutions, and actions of a number of people manifested with this uniformity, and conceived and executed like the movements of a regular army, can hardly receive the appearance of what proceeds freely and immediately from the inward inclinations. We take a much stronger interest in the situation and fate of a single example with which we have become intimately acquainted, than in a multitude of uniformly repeated impressions massed together. We have more than reason to doubt whether Æschylus treated the fable of the

third piece in such a way that Hypermnestra, the only one of the Danaidæ who is an exception to the rest, becomes the principal object from her compassion or her love : he probably here adopted the very same mode of expressing the complaints, the wishes, the cares, and supplications of the whole, the social solemnity of their action and suffering, in majestic choral songs.

In the same manner in the *Seven before Thebes*, the king and the messenger, whose speeches occupy the greatest part of the piece, speak more in virtue of their office, than as interpreters of personal feelings. The description of the attack with which the city is threatened, and of the seven leaders who, like heaven-storming giants, have sworn its destruction, and who display their arrogance in the symbols borne on their shields, is an epic subject clothed in the pomp of tragedy. This long and highly-finished preparation is of less value than the single agitating moment, when Eteocles, who has hitherto displayed the utmost degree of prudence and firmness, and stationed a patriotic hero at each gate against one of the insolent enemies, as the seventh, the author of the whole mischief, Polynices is described to him, carried along by the furies of the paternal curse, insists on becoming himself the antagonist, and notwithstanding all the entreaties of the chorus, with the clear consciousness of inevitable ruin, rushes headlong to the fratricidal strife. The war is in itself no subject for tragedy, and the poet hurries us rapidly from the ominous and important preparation to the de-

termination : the city is saved, the two competitors for the throne fall by the hands of each other, and the whole is closed by their funeral dirge, in which a part is taken by the sisters and chorus of Theban virgins. It is remarkable that the resolution of Antigone to inter her brother, notwithstanding the prohibition, with which Sophocles opens his piece of that name, is woven into the conclusion of this, a circumstance which immediately connects it with a new developement, as in the *Choephoræ*.

I could wish to believe that *Æschylus* composed the *Persians* from mere complacency for Hiero King of Syracuse, who was desirous of having the great events of the Persian war brought under his review. Such is the substance of one tradition ; but according to another the piece had been before exhibited in Athens. We have already alluded to this drama, which, both in point of selection of subject, and the manner of handling it, is undoubtedly the most imperfect of all the tragedies of the poet that we possess. Our expectation is hardly excited in the commencement by the vision of *Atossa* ; the whole catastrophe immediately opens on us with the first message, and no farther progress can be even imagined. But although not a legitimate drama, we may still consider it as a proud triumphal song in honour of liberty, clothed in soft and unceasing lamentations for the fallen majesty of the vanquished. The poet with great judgment, both here and in the *Seven before Thebes*, describes the result of the battle, not as accidental, which is almost always the case in Homer (for

accident ought never to have a place in tragedy), but as the result of arrogant and blind presumption on the one hand, and resolute moderation on the other.

The *Chained Prometheus* held also a middle place between two others, the *Fire-bringing* and the *Freed Prometheus*, if we dare reckon the first, which without question was a satirical drama, as part of a trilogy. A considerable fragment of the *Freed Prometheus* has been preserved to us in the Latin translation of Attius.

The *Chained Prometheus* is the representation of constancy under suffering, and that the never ending suffering of a god. Exiled to a naked rock on the shore of the encircling ocean, this drama still embraces the world, the Olympus of the gods, and the earth of mortals, all scarcely yet reposing in a secure state above the dread abyss of the dark Titanian powers. The idea of a self-devoting divinity has been mysteriously inculcated in many religions, as a confused foreboding of the true; here however it appears in a most alarming contrast with the consolations of revelation. For Prometheus does not suffer on an understanding with the power by whom the world is governed, but he atones for his disobedience, and that disobedience consists in nothing but the attempt to give perfection to the human race. It is thus an image of human nature itself: endowed with a miserable foresight and bound down to a narrow existence, without an ally, and with nothing to oppose to the combined and inexorable powers of nature, but an unshaken will

and the consciousness of elevated claims. The other poems of the Greek tragedians are single tragedies; but this may be called tragedy itself: its purest spirit is revealed with all the annihilating and overpowering influence of its first unmitigated austerity.

There is little external action in this piece: Prometheus merely suffers and resolves from the beginning to the end; and his sufferings and resolutions are always the same. But the poet has contrived in a masterly manner to introduce variety and progress into that which in itself was determinately fixed, and given us a scale for the measurement of the matchless power of his sublime Titans in the objects by which he has surrounded them. We have first the silence of Prometheus while he is chained down under the harsh inspection of *Strength* and *Force*, whose threats serve only to excite a useless compassion in Vulcan, who carries them into execution; then his solitary complaints, the arrival of the tender ocean nymphs, whose kind but disheartening sympathy induces him to give vent to his feelings, to relate the causes of his fall, and to reveal the future, though with prudent reserve he reveals it only in part; the visit of the ancient Oceanus, a kindred god of the race of the Titans, who, under the pretext of a zealous attachment to his cause, advises him to submission towards Jupiter, and who is on that account dismissed with proud contempt; the introduction of the raving Io driven about from place to place, the victim of the same tyranny from which Prometheus

himself suffers ; his prophecy of the wanderings to which she is still doomed, and the fate which at last awaits her, connected in some degree with his own, as from her blood he is to receive a deliverer after the lapse of many ages ; the appearance of Mercury as the messenger of the tyrant of the world, who with threats commands him to disclose the secret by which Jupiter may remain on his throne secure from all the malice of fate ; and lastly the yawning of the earth before Prometheus has well declared his refusal, amidst thunder and lightning, storms and earthquake, by which he himself and the rock to which he is chained are swallowed up in the abyss of the nether world. The triumph of subjection was never celebrated in more glorious strains, and we have difficulty in conceiving how the poet in the *Freed Prometheus* could sustain himself on such an elevation.

In the dramas of *Æschylus* we have one of many examples that, in art as well as nature, gigantic productions precede those that evince regularity of proportion, which again in their turn decline gradually into littleness and insignificance, and that poetry in its original appearance approaches always the nearest to the reverence of religion, whatever form the latter may assume among the various races of men.

A saying of the poet, which has been preserved, affords us a proof that he endeavoured to maintain himself on this elevation, and purposely avoided all artificial cultivation, which might have the effect of lowering the divinity of his character. His brethren stimulated him to write a new *Pæan*. He an-

swered : "The old one of Tynachus is the best, and the same thing would happen here that was observable in a comparison between the ancient and modern statues ; for the former with all their simplicity were considered as divine, and the modern, with all the care bestowed on their execution, were indeed admired, but bore much less of the impression of a divinity." He carried his boldness in religious matters, as in every thing else, to the utmost limits ; and he was even accused of having in one of his pieces disclosed the Eleusinean mysteries, and only absolved on the intercession of his brother Amynias, who displayed the wounds which he had received in the battle of Salamis. He perhaps believed that in the poetic communication was contained the initiation into the mysteries, and that nothing was in this way revealed to any one who was not worthy of it.

The tragic style of *Æschylus* is still imperfect, and not unfrequently runs into the unmixed epic and lyric. It is often disjointed, irregular, and hard. To compose more regular and skilful tragedies than those of *Æschylus* was by no means difficult ; but in the more than mortal grandeur which he displayed, it was impossible that he should ever be surpassed ; and even *Sophocles*, his younger and more fortunate rival, did not in this respect equal him. The latter, in speaking of *Æschylus*, gave a proof that he was himself a reflecting artist : "*Æschylus* does what is right without knowing it." These few simple words exhaust the whole of

what we understand by powerful genius unconscious of its powers.

The birth year of Sophocles was nearly at an equal distance between that of his predecessor and of Euripides, so that he was about half a life time from each: in this all the accounts are found to coincide. He was however during the greatest part of his life the contemporary of both. He frequently contended for the tragic garland with Æschylus, and he outlived Euripides, who himself attained a good age. If I may speak in the spirit of the ancient religion, it seems that a beneficent Providence wished to evince to the human race, in the instance of this individual, the dignity and felicity of their lot, as he was endowed with every divine gift, with all that can adorn and elevate the mind and the heart, and crowned with every blessing imaginable in this life. Descended from rich and honoured parents, and born a free citizen of the most cultivated state of Greece, such were the advantages with which he entered the world. Beauty of body and of soul, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of both in the utmost perfection, till the extreme limits of human existence; an education the most extensive, yet select, in gymnastics and music, the former so important in the developement of the bodily powers, and the latter in the communication of harmony; the sweet blossom of youth, and the ripe fruit of age; the possession and continued enjoyment of poetry and art, and the exercise of serene wisdom; love and respect among his fellow

citizens, fame in other countries, and the countenance and favour of the gods : these are the general features of the life of this pious and virtuous poet. It would seem as if the gods, in return for his dedicating himself at an early age to Bacchus, as the giver of all joy, and the author of the cultivation of the human race, by the representation of tragical dramas for his festivals, had wished to confer immortality on him, so long did they delay the hour of his death ; but as this was impossible, they extinguished his life at least as gently as possible, that he might imperceptibly change one immortality for another, the long duration of his earthly existence for an imperishable name. When a youth of sixteen, he was selected, on account of his beauty, to play on the lyre, and to dance in the Greek manner before the chorus of youths who, after the battle of Salamis (in which Æschylus fought, and which he has so nobly described) executed the Pæan round the trophy erected on that occasion ; so that the fairest developement of his youthful beauty coincided with the moment when the Athenian people had attained the epoch of their highest glory. He held the rank of general along with Pericles and Thucydides, and, when arrived at a more advanced age, the priesthood of a native hero. In his twenty-fifth year he began to represent tragedies ; twenty times he was victorious ; he often gained the second place, and he never was ranked in the third. In this career he proceeded with increasing success till he exceeded his ninetieth year ; and some of his greatest works were even

the fruit of a still later period. There is a story of an accusation brought against him by one or more of his elder sons, of having become childish from age, because he was too fond of a grand-child by a second wife, and of being no longer in a condition to manage his own affairs. In his defence he merely read to his judges his *Œdipus in Colonos*, which he had then composed in honour of Colonos, his birth-place, and the astonished judges, without farther consultation, conducted him in triumph to his house. If it be true that the second *Œdipus* was written at so late an age, as from its mature serenity and total freedom from the impetuosity and violence of youth we have good reason to conclude that it actually was, it affords us at once a pleasing picture of the delight and the reverence which attended his concluding years. Although the various accounts of his death appear fabulous, they all coincide in this, that he departed without a struggle, while employed in his art, or something connected with it, and that, like an old swan of Apollo, he breathed out his life in song. I consider also the story of the Lacedemonian general who had fortified the burying-ground of his fathers, and who, twice exhorted by Bacchus in a vision to allow Sophocles to be there interred, dispatched a herald to the Athenians on the subject, with a number of other circumstances, as the strongest possible proof of the established reverence in which his name was held. In calling him virtuous and pious, I spoke in the true sense of the words; for although his works breathe the real character of ancient grandeur,

sweetness, and simplicity, of all the Grecian poets he is also the individual whose feelings bear the strongest affinity to the spirit of our religion.

One gift alone was refused to him by nature : a voice attuned to song. He could only call forth and direct the harmonious effusions of other voices ; he was therefore compelled to depart from the established practice of the poet acting a part in his own pieces, and only once (a very characteristic trait) made his appearance in the character of the blind singer *Thamyris* playing on the *cithara*.

As *Æschylus*, who raised tragic poetry from its rude beginnings to the dignity of the *cothurnus*, was his predecessor ; the historical relations in which he stood to *Sophocles* enabled the latter to avail himself of the inventions of his original master, so that *Æschylus* appears as the rough designer, and *Sophocles* as the finished successor. The more artful construction of the dramas of the latter is easily perceived : the limitation of the chorus with respect to the dialogue, the polish of the *rhythmus*, and the pure *Attic* diction, the introduction of a greater number of characters, the increase of contrivance in the fable, the multiplication of incidents, a greater degree of developement, the more tranquil continuance of all the moments of the action, and the greater degree of theatrical effect given to incidents of a decisive nature, the more perfect rounding of the whole, even considered in a mere external point of view. But he excelled *Æschylus* in somewhat still more essential, and proved himself deserving of the good fortune of

having such a preceptor, and of entering into competition with him in the same subjects: I mean the harmonious perfection of his mind, by which he fulfilled from inclination every duty prescribed by the laws of beauty, and of which the impulse was in him accompanied by the most clear consciousness. It was impossible to exceed Æschylus in boldness of conception; I am inclined however to believe that Sophocles appears only less bold from his wisdom and moderation, as he always goes to work with the greatest energy, and perhaps with even a more determined severity, like a man who knows the extent of his powers, and is determined, when he does not exceed them, to stand up with the greater confidence for his rights.* As Æschylus delights in transporting us to the convulsions of the primary world of the Titans, Sophocles on the other hand never avails himself of the gods but when their appearance is necessary; he

* This idea has been so happily expressed by the greatest genius perhaps of the last century, that the translator hopes he will be forgiven for here transcribing the passage: "I can truly say that, poor and unknown as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works, as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion, that the mistakes and blunders both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves. To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended.

—*Letter from Burns to Dr. Moore, in Currie's Life.*—TRANS.

formed men, according to the general confession of antiquity, better, that is, not more moral, or exempt from error, but more beautiful and noble than they appeared in real life; and while he took every thing in the most human signification, he was at the same time aware of their superior destination. According to all appearance he was also more moderate than Æschylus in his scenic ornaments; he displayed perhaps more taste and selection in his objects, but did not attempt the same colossal pomp.

To characterize the native sweetness and affection so eminent in this poet, the ancients gave him the appellation of the Attic bee. Whoever is thoroughly imbued with the feeling of this property may flatter himself that a sense for ancient art has arisen within him; for the affected sentimentality of the present day, far from coinciding with him in this opinion, would both in the representation of bodily sufferings, and in the language and economy of the tragedies of Sophocles, find much of an unsupportable austerity.

When we consider the great fertility of Sophocles, for according to some he wrote a hundred and thirty pieces (of which however seventeen were pronounced spurious by Aristophanes the grammarian), and eighty according to the most moderate account, we cannot help wondering that seven only should have come down to us. Chance however has so far favoured us, that in these seven pieces we find several which were held by the ancients as his greatest works, *Antigone* for ex-

ample, *Electra*, and the two *Ædipus*; and these have also come down to us tolerably free from mutilation and corruption in their text. The first *Ædipus* and *Philoctetes* have been generally, without any good reason, preferred to all the others by the modern critics: the first on account of the artifice of the plot, in which the dreadful catastrophe, powerfully calculated to excite our curiosity (a rare case in the Greek tragedies), is brought about inevitably by a succession of causes, all dependent on each other; the latter on account of the masterly display of character, the beautiful contrast observable in the three leading individuals, and the simple structure of the piece, in which, with so few persons, every thing proceeds from the truest motives. But the whole of the tragedies of Sophocles are conspicuous for their separate excellencies. In *Antigone* we have the purest display of female heroism; in *Ajax* the manly feeling of honour in its whole force; in the *Trachiniæ* (or, as we should name it, *the Dying Hercules*), the female levity of Dejanira is beautifully atoned for by her death, and the sufferings of Hercules are portrayed with suitable dignity; *Electra* is distinguished for energy and pathos; in *Ædipus Coloneus* there prevails the mildest emotion, and over the whole piece there is diffused the utmost sweetness. I will not undertake to weigh the respective merits of these pieces against each other: but I am free to confess that I entertain a singular predilection for the last of them, as it appears to me the most expressive of the personal feelings of the poet himself. As this piece was written for the very

purpose of throwing a lustre on Athens, and the spot of his birth more particularly, he appears to have laboured it with a remarkable degree of fondness.

Ajax and Antigone are usually the least understood. We cannot conceive how these pieces should be continued so long after what we generally call the catastrophe. I shall hereafter submit an observation on this subject.

Of all the fables of the ancient mythology into which fate is made to enter, the story of *Œdipus* is perhaps the most ingenious; but yet there are others, as for example *Niobe*, which without such a complication of incidents are highly calculated to afford us a simple representation of human arrogance, and the punishment suspended over it by the gods, conceived on a more colossal scale, and in a grander style. The very intrigue of *Œdipus* detracts from its elevation of character. Intrigue in the dramatic sense is a complication arising from the crossing of purposes and events, and the fate of *Œdipus* affords this in a high degree, as all that is done by his parents or himself to escape the predicted horrors serve only the more to involve him. But that which gives so grand and terrible a character to this drama, is the circumstance which, for the most part however, is overlooked; that it is the *Œdipus* who solved the riddle of the *Sphinx* relating to human life, to whom his own life remains an inextricable riddle, till it is cleared up to him in the most dreadful manner when too late, and when all is irrecoverably lost. This is an admirable picture of the pretension of human wisdom,

which is ever aspiring at general improvement, while the possessor knows not how to make the proper application to himself.

Notwithstanding the severe conclusion of the first *Œdipus*, we are so far reconciled to it by the violence, suspicion, and haughtiness in the character of *Œdipus*, that our feelings are not wrought up to the highest pitch of indignation against the cruelty of his fate. It was necessary in so far to sacrifice the character of *Œdipus*, who raises himself however in our estimation by his fatherly care and heroic zeal for the welfare of his people, that allow him, in his honest inquiries after the author of the crime, to hasten his own destruction. It was necessary for the sake of the contrast which his future misery exhibits, to allow him to appear before *Tiresias* and *Creon*, clothed in all the pride of regal dignity. In his earlier transactions we may already remark something of suspicion and violence ; in the uneasiness he still felt at the charge of being a supposititious child, notwithstanding all the assurances of *Polybos*, and in the bloody quarrel in which he was afterwards engaged with *Laius*. This character he seems to have inherited from both his parents. The arrogant levity of *Jocasta*, which induces her to treat the oracle with derision when she conceived it was not confirmed by the event, though it is afterwards consummated in her own sufferings, was not indeed inherited by her son : he is on the contrary conspicuous throughout for the purity of his intentions ; and the care and anxiety with which he fled from the predicted crime, added

naturally to the poignancy of his despair, when he found that he had nevertheless committed it. His blindness is indeed dreadful, as the explanation is so very obvious; for example, when he puts the question to Jocasta, how did Laius look? and she answers he had become gray-haired, otherwise in appearance he was not unlike Œdipus. This is also another feature of her levity, that she should not have been struck with the resemblance to her husband, a circumstance that might have led her to recognize him as her son. On a closer dissection of the piece, we shall find the utmost propriety and circumspection in every feature of it. As we are however accustomed to extol the correctness of Sophocles, and to boast more especially of the probability which prevails throughout this Œdipus, I must here remark that this very piece is a proof that on this subject the ancient artists followed very different principles from those of modern critics. For, according to the way of thinking of the latter, nothing could be more improbable than that Œdipus should, during such a length of time, have never inquired into the circumstances of the death of Laius, and that the scars on his feet, and even the name which he bore, should have excited no suspicion in Jocasta, &c. But the ancients did not produce their works of art for calculating and prosaic understandings; and an improbability which required dissection to be found out, and which did not appear in the course of the representation itself, passed with them for no improbability.

The diversity of character of Æschylus and So-

sophocles is nowhere more conspicuous than in the *Eumenides* and the *Œdipus Coloneus*, as both these pieces have the same aim. This aim is to confer glory on Athens as the sacred abode of law and humanity, where the crimes of illustrious families of other countries might, by a higher mediation, be at last propitiated ; and hence an ever-during prosperity was predicted to the Athenian people. The patriotic and free-minded *Æschylus* has recourse to a judicial, and the pious *Sophocles* to a religious, proceeding. The *Œdipus Coloneus* may be styled his consecration after death ; for as he was bent down by the consciousness of inevitable crimes, and lengthened misery, the gods, it would appear, were desirous of conferring on him this honour, to show that in the terrible example which they made of him, they had no intention of visiting him in particular with punishment, but merely wished to give a severe lesson to the human race. *Sophocles*, whose whole life might be called one continued worship of the gods, was particularly fond of adorning the last moments of existence with the splendour of a religious festival ; and the emotion which he produces on such occasions is very different from that which the thought of mortality is in general calculated to excite. That the tortured and exhausted *Œdipus* should at last find peace and repose in the grove of the *Furies*, in the very spot from which all other mortals fled with aversion and horror, he whose misfortune consisted in having done that at which every human being must shudder, without the consciousness or warning of

any inward feeling to guide him ; in this there is a profound and mysterious sense.

Æschylus has given us in the person of *Pallas* a more majestic representation of the Attic cultivation, presence of mind, moderation, mildness, and magnanimity ; but *Sophocles*, who was so much inclined to draw down every thing divine into the province of humanity, has developed them in a more refined manner in his *Theseus*. He who is desirous of seeing the Grecian heroism accurately contrasted with the Barbarian, would do well to consider this character with attention.

In *Æschylus*, before the victim of persecution can be saved, and the land can participate in the blessings, the hellish horror of the *Furies* must congeal the blood of the spectator, and make his hair stand on end, and the whole rancour of these goddesses of rage must be exhausted : the transition to their peaceful retreat is therefore the more astonishing ; it seems as if the whole human race were redeemed from their power. In *Sophocles* however they do not even once make their appearance, but are altogether kept in the back ground ; and they are not called by their proper name, but made known to us by descriptions in which they are a good deal spared. But even this obscurity and distance, so suitable to these daughters of night, is calculated to excite in us a still dread in which the bodily senses have no part. The clothing the grove of the *Furies* with all the charms of a southern spring completes the sweetness of the poem ; and were I to select an image of the poetry of *Sophocles*

from his tragedies, I should describe it as a sacred grove of the dark goddesses of fate, in which the laurel, the olive, and the vine display their luxuriant vegetation, and the song of the nightingale is for ever heard.

Two of the pieces of Sophocles, agreeably to the Greek way of thinking, turn on the sacred rights of the dead, and the importance of interment; in *Antigone* the whole of the action hinges on this, and in *Ajax* it forms the satisfactory conclusion of the piece.

The female portrait of *Antigone* is characterized by great austerity, and it is sufficient of itself to put an end to all the seductive representations of Greek allurements, which of late have been so universally current. Her discontent when Ismene refuses to participate in her daring resolution; the manner in which she afterwards repulses Ismene when she repents of her weakness, borders on hardness; her silence and speeches against Creon, by which she provokes him to carry his tyrannical determination into execution, display all the steadfastness of purpose of the most masculine mind. The poet has however discovered the secret of painting the lovely affection of the female disposition in one single line, when in answer to the assertion of Creon, that Polynices was an enemy to his country, she answers :

My love shall go with thine, but not my hate.*

* This is the version of Franklin, but it does not convey the meaning of the original, and I am not aware that the English language is sufficiently flexible to admit of an exact translation.

She puts a constraint on her feelings as long as possible, that she may not, by giving loose to them, render the firmness of her determination problematical. When however she is led out to an inevitable death, she pours herself out in the most tender and affecting wailings over her hard and untimely fate, and does not hesitate, though a chaste virgin, to mourn her lost bridal, and the unenjoyed blessings of the marriage state. Yet she never in a single syllable betrays any inclination for Hæmon, and not even mentions the name of that amiable youth.* It would have been betraying a weakness to have shown, after such a heroic resolution, that she had any tie which still bound her to existence ; but to have relinquished those common enjoyments which the gods have scattered throughout this life, without a feeling of melancholy, would have been unsuitable to the devout sanctity of her mind. On a first view the chorus in Antigone may appear weak, as it accedes at once to the tyrannical commands of Creon, without opposition, and without even attempting to make the slightest representation in favour of the young heroine. But to exhibit the determination and the deed of Antigone in their full glory, it was necessary that she

The German which, though far inferior to the Greek in harmony, is little behind in flexibility, has in this respect great advantage over the English; and Schlegel's "*nicht mitzuhassen, mitzulieben bin ich da,*" represents exactly Οὔτοι σπνχθω ἄλλὰ συμφίλειν εἶπον.—TRANS.

* Barthelemy asserts the contrary ; but the lines to which he refers, in the more correct manuscripts, and even according to the connexion of the whole passage, belong to Ismene.

should have no support and no dependance. The very subjection of the chorus increases our impression of the irresistible nature of the royal commands. For this reason it was necessary to mingle in its concluding discourse with Antigone the most painful recollections, that she might drink the cup of earthly sufferings to the very dregs. The case is very different in *Electra*, where the chorus takes such an interest in the fate of the two principal characters, and encourages them to the commission of the deed, as the moral feelings are divided respecting it, whereas there is no such contention in *Antigone*, who could only have been deterred from her purpose by merely external fears.

After the fulfilment of the deed, and the infliction of the suffering for it, there still remains the correction of the arrogance of Creon, by which the death of Antigone is to be avenged; and the destruction of his whole family, with his own despair, could alone be a sufficient atonement for the sacrifice of so valuable a life. We have therefore the wife of the king, who is not even named before, brought at last on the stage, that she may hear the misfortune, and put an end to her existence. With the Grecian feeling, it would have been impossible to have considered the poem as concluded with the death of Antigone, without a penal retaliation.

It is the same in *Ajax*. His arrogance, which was punished with a degrading insanity, is atoned for by the deep shame which at length drives him to self-murder. The persecution of the unfortunate man must not however be carried any farther,

and when it is in contemplation to disgrace his remains by the refusal of interment, even Ulysses interferes, whom he had looked upon as his mortal enemy, and to whom Pallas, in the dreadful introductory scene, shows the nothingness of the human race in the example of the delirious Ajax : he appears as a sort of personification of moderation, which, if it had been possessed by Ajax, would have prevented his fall.

Self-murder is frequent in the ancient mythology, especially in the part of it converted into tragedy ; but it generally takes place, though not in a state of insanity, yet in a state of agitation, after a sudden calamity which leaves no room for consideration. Such self-murders as those of Jocasta, Hæmon, Eurydice, and Dejanira, appear merely in the light of a subordinate appendage in the tragical pictures of Sophocles ; but the suicide of Ajax is a cool determination, a free action, and of sufficient importance to become the principal object of the piece. It is not the last fatal crisis of a slow mental malady, as is so often the case in the more effeminate modern times ; still less is it that more theoretical tedium of life, founded on a conviction of its worthlessness, which induced so many of the later Romans, on Epicurean as well as Stoical principles, to put an end to their existence. Ajax is not by any unmanly despondency unfaithful to his rough heroism. His delirium is over, as well as his first inconsolable state, when he awakes to a knowledge of himself ; and it is not till the most complete return to consciousness, after he has had

time to measure the depth of the abyss into which he has been plunged by the divine destiny, that he contemplates his situation as ruined beyond remedy : his honour wounded by the loss of the arms of Achilles ; the unfortunate termination of his vindictive rage, which in his infatuation had been wasted on defenceless flocks ; he himself, after a long and reproachless heroic career, a source of amusement to his enemies, an object of derision and abomination to the Greeks, and the shame of his honoured father if he should so return to him : he decides according to his maxim, " to live gloriously, or to die gloriously," and the latter course only remains open to him. Even the dissimulation, the first perhaps which he ever practised in his life, by which he quiets his companions, that he may not be disturbed in the execution of his design, must be considered in the light of greatness of soul. He appoints Teucer guardian to his infant boy, the future consolation of his forlorn parents ; and, like Cato, he does not die till he has arranged the concerns of all his family. As Antigone in her female tenderness, so even he in his wild manner seems in his last speech to feel the majesty of the light of the sun, from which he takes his final leave. His rough mind rejects all pity, and therefore excites it the more powerfully. What an image of awaking out of the tumult of passion, when the tent opens, and he sits lamenting amidst the slaughtered herds.

As Ajax, in the feeling of inextinguishable shame, is induced to form the violent resolution of throwing away life, Philoctetes on the other hand bears

its wearisome load, during long years of misery, with the most persevering patience. If Ajax is honoured by his despair, Philoctetes is equally ennobled by his constancy. As the instinct of self preservation came into collision with no moral impulse, it was proper to exhibit it in its entire strength. Nature has armed with this instinct whatever is possessed of the breath of life, and the vigour with which every hostile attack on existence is repelled is the strongest proof of its excellence. In the presence, it is true, of that human society by which he had been abandoned, and in the dependance on their superiority, Philoctetes would no more have been desirous of life than Ajax. But he finds himself alone in the midst of nature, he dreads nothing from the frightful aspect which she exhibits to him, and still even clings to the maternal bosom of the all-nourishing earth. Exiled on a desert island, tormented by an incurable wound, solitary and helpless as he is, he still by his arrows procures his food from the fowls of the forest, the rock bears alleviating plants, his cave yields him a shelter and coolness in summer, in winter he is warmed by the mid-day sun, or kindled branches; even the raging attacks of his pain at length exhaust themselves, and leave him in a refreshing sleep. Alas! it is the artificial refinements, the oppressive burden of a relaxing and deadening superfluity which render man indifferent to the value of life: when it is stripped of all foreign appendages, though borne down with sufferings so that the naked

existence alone remains, still will its sweets flow from the heart at each pulsation throughout every vein of the body. This poor unfortunate man! ten long years has he struggled; and yet he still lives, and cleaves to life and hope. What a force of truth there is in all this! What moves us the most however in *Philoctetes* is, that he, who by an abuse of power was cast out from society, so soon as it again approaches him, is exposed to a second and still more dangerous evil, that of falsehood. The apprehension lest he might be deprived of his bow, his last means of subsistence, would be too painful for the spectator, if he did not from the beginning entertain some suspicion that the open and sincere *Neoptolemus* will not be able to carry through to the end the character which he assumed so much against his will. It is not without reason after this deception, that *Philoctetes* turns away from men to those inanimate companions, to which the innate want of society had attached him. He calls on the island and its volcanoes to witness the fresh injustice which he has suffered; he believes that his beloved bow feels a pain in being torn from him; and at length he takes a melancholy leave of his hospitable cavern, the fountains and the wave-washed cliffs from which he so often looked in vain to the ocean: so inclined to love is the uncorrupted mind of man.

Respecting the bodily sufferings of *Philoctetes* and the manner of representing them, Lessing has in his *Laocoön* declared himself against Win-

kelmann, and Herder again has in the *Silvæ Criticæ** contradicted Lessing. Both the two last writers have made many excellent observations on the piece, although we must allow with Herder, that Winkelmann was correct in affirming that the Philoctetes of Sophocles suffers like Laocoön in the celebrated group, namely, with the struggling of a heroic soul never altogether overcome by the pain.

The *Trachiniæ* appears to me so very inferior in worth to the other pieces of Sophocles which have come down to us, that I could wish to have some foundation for supposing that this tragedy was composed in the same age, in his school, and perhaps by his son Jophon, and that it was by mistake attributed to Sophocles. There is much both in the structure and disposition, and in the style of the piece, calculated to excite suspicion; and many critics have remarked that the introductory soliloquy of Dejanira, without any motive, is very unlike the character of the prologues of Sophocles. Although however the rules of art of the poet are observed on the whole, yet this is done in a superficial manner, and we nowhere perceive the deep mind of Sophocles. But as no one writer of antiquity appears to have doubted its authenticity, and as Cicero even cites the complaint of Hercules as from an indisputable work of Sophocles, we are compelled to content ourselves with the remark, that the tragedian has for once remained below his usual elevation.

* *In den Kritischen Wäldern*, literally, in the Critical Forests. The Latin expression *Silva Critica* is familiar to us.—TRANS.

This brings us to the consideration of a question which will still occupy the critic a great deal more in the examination of the works of Euripides: how far the invention and execution of a drama must belong to one man, that he may pass for its author. Dramatic literature affords numerous examples of plays composed by several persons in common. It is well known that Euripides, in the execution of his pieces, availed himself of the assistance of Kephisophon, a learned servant; and he perhaps also consulted with him respecting his plots. It appears certain however that in Athens there had then been formed dramatic schools of art, of such a character as usually arise when poetical talents are called into exercise by public competition, and with great fulness and preparation: schools of art which contain scholars of such excellence and of such kindred genius, that the master may confide a part of the execution, and even the plan, to them, and yet allow the whole to pass under his name without any injury to his fame. Such were the schools of painting of the sixteenth century, and every one knows what a remarkable degree of critical acumen is necessary to discover in many of Raphael's pictures how much of them properly belongs to himself. Sophocles had educated his son Jophon to the tragic art, and he could easily therefore receive assistance from him in the execution of his pieces, especially as it was necessary that the tragedies that were to compete for the prize should be ready and got by heart by a certain day: he might also on the other hand execute occasional passages for

the works originally planned by the son ; and the pieces of this description, in which the hand of the master was perceivable, would be naturally attributed to the more celebrated name.

LECTURE V.

Euripides.—His merits and defects.—Decline of tragic poetry through him.—Comparison between the *Choephoræ* of Æschylus, the *Electra* of Sophocles, and that of Euripides.—Character of the remaining works of the latter.—The satirical drama.—Alexandrian tragic poets.

WHIEN we consider Euripides by himself, without any comparison with his predecessors, when we take a separate view of some of his better pieces, and detached scenes throughout the others, we cannot refuse to him an extraordinary degree of praise. But on the other hand when we place him in connexion with the history of art, when we consider his pieces as a whole, and reflect on the object which he appears in general to have had in view in all the works which have come down to us, we are compelled to bestow severe censure on him on various accounts. Of few writers may both good and evil be said with so much truth. He was a man of infinite ingenuity, and practised in the greatest variety of mental arts; but neither the sublime seriousness of mind, nor the severe wisdom, which we revere in Æschylus and Sophocles, regulated in him a luxuriant fulness of the most splendid and amiable qualities. His constant aim is ~~to~~ please by whatever means: and hence he is so very unequal to himself: frequently he has ~~the~~ passages of the most overpowering beauty, and

at other times he sinks into the most downright common place. With all his errors he possesses an admirable ease and lightness, and a certain insinuating power which it is difficult to withstand.

These preliminary observations I have judged necessary, as it might otherwise be objected to me that I am at variance with myself, having a short time ago, in a small French treatise, endeavoured to show the superiority of a piece of Euripides, compared with an imitation of Racine. There I fixed my attention on a detached drama, and that one of the best of the works of this poet; but here I consider every thing from the most general points of view, and with a reference to the highest demands of art, and must therefore justify my enthusiasm for ancient tragedy by a keen examination into the traces of its degeneracy and decline, that my predilection may not appear blind and extravagant.

We may compare a perfection in art and poetry to the summit of a steep mountain, where a load forced up with labour cannot long remain, but immediately rolls down the other side. It descends according to the laws of gravity with quickness and ease, and is seen with satisfaction; for the mass follows its natural inclination, while the laborious ascent is in some degree a painful spectacle.—Hence it happens, for example, that the paintings of periods during which art was on the decline are much more pleasing to the unlearned eye, than those which preceded the period of its perfection. The genuine connoisseur, on the other hand, will rank the pictures of a Zuccheri and others, who

gave the tone when the great schools of the sixteenth century degenerated into empty and superficial mannerism, far below the works of a Mantegna, Perugino, and their contemporaries, in real and essential worth. Or let us suppose the highest perfection of art a focus: at an equal distance on the nearest and farthest side, the collected rays occupy the same space, but on this side they labour together in producing one common effect; whereas on the other they fly asunder, till at last they are altogether lost.

We have besides a particular reason for censuring without reserve the errors of this poet: namely, that our age is infected with the same vices with those which procured for Euripides so much favour, if not real respect, from his contemporaries. In our times we have seen a number of plays which, though in substance and form far below those of Euripides, bear yet in so far a resemblance to them, that they seduce and corrupt the feelings by means of effeminate, and sometimes even tender, emotions, while their general tendency is to produce a true moral licentiousness.

What I shall say on this subject will not, for the most part, possess even novelty. Although the moderns have not unfrequently preferred Euripides to his two predecessors, and have unquestionably read, admired, and imitated him much more: whether attracted by the greater affinity of views and sentiments, or led astray by an opinion of Aristotle which they have not understood; it so happens however that many of the ancients, some

of them even the contemporaries of Euripides, were of the same opinion with myself. In Anacharsis we find this mixture of praise and censure at least alluded to, though the author softens every thing for the sake of his object of showing the Grecian productions of every description in the most advantageous light.

We possess some cutting sayings of Sophocles respecting Euripides, though he was so far from being actuated by any thing like the jealousy of authorship, that he mourned his death, and, in a piece which was shortly after exhibited, refused to his actors the ornament of the floral crown. I consider myself warranted in viewing the accusation of Plato against the tragic poets, that they gave men too much up to the dominion of the passions, and rendered them effeminate by putting extravagant lamentations in the mouths of their heroes, as directed against Euripides alone; for with respect to his predecessors the injustice of them would have been universally evident. The derisory attacks of Aristophanes are well known, though not sufficiently understood and appreciated. Aristotle bestows on him many a severe censure, and when he calls Euripides the most tragic of poets, he by no means ascribes to him the greatest perfection in the tragic art in general, but merely alludes to the effect which is produced by unfortunate catastrophes; for he immediately adds: "although he does not regulate other things well." The Scholiast of Euripides, too, contains many a short and forcible criticism on particular pieces, among which are

perhaps preserved several of the opinions of the Alexandrian critics, those critics of whom Aristarchus, one of the number, from his judgment and acuteness, has had his name handed down to posterity, as a by-word for a literary judge.

In Euripides we no longer find the essence of the ancient tragedy in its pure and unmixed state; its characteristic features are already in part extinguished. We have already placed this essence in the prevailing idea of destiny, in the ideality of the composition, and in the signification of the chorus.

Euripides inherited, it is true, the idea of destiny from his predecessors, and his belief of it was sharpened by the tragic practice; but yet in him fate is seldom the invisible spirit of the whole composition, the radical thought of the tragic world. We have seen that this idea may be exhibited under severer or milder aspects; that the obscure terror of destiny may, in the connexion of a whole trilogy, be cleared up to the signification of a wise and beneficent providence. Euripides however has drawn it down from the region of the infinite; and inevitable necessity not unfrequently degenerates in him into the caprice of accident. He can no longer therefore give it its proper and peculiar direction, namely, by contrast and opposition, to elevate the moral liberty of man. How few of his pieces turn on the constant struggle with the decrees of fate, or even on a heroic subjection to them! His characters generally suffer because they must, and not because they will.

The mutual subordination of character and pas-

sion to ideal elevation, which we find observed in the same order in Sophocles, and in the plastic artists of the Greeks, Euripides has completely reversed. Passion is the principal object with him ; his next care is for character, and when these endeavours leave him still any remaining room, he occasionally seeks to connect grandeur and dignity with the more frequent display of amiable attractions.

It has been already admitted that the persons in tragedy ought not to be all equally exempt from error, as there would then be no opposition among them, and consequently no room for a plot. But Euripides has, as Aristotle observes, frequently painted his characters in black colours without any necessity, as for example, his Menelaus in Orestes. He was warranted by the traditions sanctioned by popular belief, in attributing great crimes to many of the old heroes, but he invented besides many base and paltry traits for them of his own free inclination. It was by no means the object of Euripides to represent the race of heroes as towering above the men of his own age by their gigantic stature ; here he endeavours to fill up, or to build over, the chasm between his contemporaries and that wonderful world of old, and to surprise the gods and heroes in their undress, a mode of observation, it is usually said, of which no greatness can stand the test. He introduces his spectators to a sort of familiar acquaintance with them ; he does not draw the supernatural and fabulous into the circle of humanity (which we praised in Sophocles), but within the limits of imperfect

individuality. This is the meaning of Sophocles, when he said that he himself painted men as they ought to be, and Euripides as they actually were. Not that his own persons are always represented as models of irreproachable behaviour; his opinion referred merely to ideal elevation and sweetness in character and manners. It seems as if Euripides were always well pleased to be enabled to say to his spectators, See! those beings were men, had exactly the same weaknesses, and acted from the same motives as yourselves, and even the lowest among you. He paints therefore with particular love and complacency the defects and moral failings of his characters, and he even allows them to make a disclosure of them in naïve self confessions.— They are frequently not merely undignified, but they even boast of their imperfections.

The chorus is for the most part in him an unessential ornament: its songs are frequently wholly episodical, without any reference to the action, and more distinguished for brilliancy than for sublimity and true inspiration. “We must consider the chorus,” says Aristotle, “as one of the actors, and as a part of the whole; it must enter into the action: not as in Euripides, but as Sophocles has done.” The ancient comic writers enjoyed the privilege of allowing the chorus occasionally to address the spectators in its own name; this was called a parabasis, and, as I shall afterwards show, was suitable to the spirit of comedy. Although the practice is by no means tragical, it was however, according to the testimony of Julius Pollux, frequently adopted by

Euripides in his dramas, who so far forgot himself on some of those occasions, that, in the *Danaidæ* for instance, the chorus, which consisted of females, made use of grammatical inflections which belonged only to the male sex.

This poet has thus at the same time destroyed the internal essence of tragedy, and sinned against the laws of beauty and proportion in its external structure. He generally sacrifices the whole to the effect of particular parts, and in these he is also more ambitious of foreign attractions than of genuine poetical beauty.

In the accompanying music, he adopted all the innovations invented by Timotheus, and selected those melodies which were most in unison with the effeminacy of his poetry. He proceeded in the same manner with his syllabic measures; his versification is luxuriant and breaks through every rule. The same diluted and effeminate character would, on a more profound investigation, be unquestionably found to belong also to the rhythm of his choral songs.

On all occasions he exhibits to satiety those charms that are merely of a corporeal nature, which Winkelmann calls a flattery of the coarse external senses; whatever is calculated to excite, to strike, and to produce a strong effect without true worth for the mind and the feelings. He labours for effect in a degree which cannot be allowed to the tragic poet. For example, he hardly ever omits an opportunity of throwing his characters into a sudden and useless terror; his aged persons

are always complaining of the wants and helplessness of age, and crawl with trembling joints up the ascent from the orchestra to the stage, which frequently represented the declivity of a mountain, sighing over the misery of their situation. He is always endeavouring to move, and for the sake of emotion he not only violates probability but even the connexion of his pieces. He is strong in his pictures of misfortune; but he often claims our compassion not for the inward agony of the soul, nor for pain which the suffering individual endeavours to overcome, and to bear with manly fortitude, but for the unreserved expression of bodily misery. He is fond of reducing his heroes to the condition of beggars, of allowing them to suffer hunger and want, of exhibiting them with all the external signs of mendicity, and displaying their tattered rags, as Aristophanes has so humorously remarked in his *Acharnæ*.

Euripides was a frequenter of the schools of the philosophers, (he was a scholar of Anaxagoras, and not of Socrates, as many have erroneously stated, having only been connected with the latter by social intercourse); and he displays a particular vanity in introducing philosophical doctrines on all occasions, in my opinion in a very imperfect manner, as we should not be able to understand these doctrines from him if we were not before acquainted with them. He conceives it too vulgar a thing to believe in the gods in the simple manner of the people, and he therefore seizes every opportunity of interspersing something of their allegorical

signification, and of giving his spectators to understand that the nature of his own belief was very problematical. We may distinguish in him a two-fold character: the poet whose productions were consecrated to a religious solemnity which existed under the protection of religion, and which was therefore under a reciprocal obligation of returning that protection with honour and reverence; and the sophist with his philosophical *dicta*, who endeavoured to introduce his sceptical opinions and doubts into the fabulous prodigies connected with the religion from which he derived the subjects of his pieces. But while he shakes the ground-works of religion, he acts at the same time the moralist; and for the sake of popularity he applied to the heroic life, and the heroic ages, what could only be suitable to the social relations of his contemporaries. He throws out a multitude of moral maxims, many of which he often repeats, and for the most part they are either trite, or fundamentally false. With all this moral ostentation, the aim of his pieces, the general impression which they are calculated to produce is sometimes extremely immoral. An anecdote is told of him, that he introduced Bellerophon with a silly eulogium on wealth, in which he preferred it to all domestic happiness, and ended with observing, if Aphrodite (who bore the appellation of the golden) shone like gold, she was deserving of the love of mortals; and that the spectators took umbrage at this, raised a loud outcry, and wished to stone both actor and poet. Euripides then sprang forward, and called out: "Wait only

till the end, he will be requited accordingly!" In like manner he defended himself against the objection that his Ixion expressed himself in too disgusting and abominable language, by observing that the piece concluded with his being broken on the wheel. But the assistance of poetical justice in punishing the baseness of his characters is not always called in. In some of his pieces the wicked escape altogether untouched. Lies and other infamous practices are openly protected, especially when he can assign for them a supposed noble motive. He has also very much at his command the seductive sophistry of the passions, by which an appearance can be lent to every thing. The following verse in justification of perjury, and in which the *reservatio mentalis* of the casuists seems to be substantially expressed, is well known :

The tongue swore, but the sense swore not.

In the connexion in which this verse is uttered, and on account of which he was so often ridiculed by Aristophanes, there is indeed a justification ; but the formula is nevertheless bad, on account of the possible abuse of its application. Another verse of Euripides : " For the sake of power it is worth while to commit injustice, but in other respects we must be just ; " was frequently in the mouth of Cæsar, with the like intention of making a bad application of it.

Euripides was frequently condemned by the ancients for his seductive invitations to the enjoyment of sensual love. Every man must be dis-

gusted when Hecuba, for the sake of inducing Agamemnon to punish Polymestor, reminds him of the pleasures which he has enjoyed in the arms of Cassandra his captive and mistress, according to the laws of the heroic ages: she wishes to purchase the avenging her murdered son with the sanction and humiliating confession of the degradation of her living daughter. He was the first poet who ever thought of making the unbridled passion of a Medea, and the unnatural love of a Phædra, the principal subject of his dramas, as from the manners of the ancients we may easily conceive why love, which with them was less honoured by tender feelings, should appear to hold only a subordinate rank in their older tragedies. With all this importance which he has communicated to his female parts, he is notoriously famed for his hatred of women; and it is impossible to deny that he abounds in passages displaying the weaknesses of the female sex, and the superiority of men, to whom he evidently endeavoured by that means to pay court, as though the latter were not the whole of his audience, they yet constituted by far the greater part of it. A cutting saying and an epigram of Sophocles, on this subject, have been preserved, in which he accounts for the misogyny of Euripides from his having had ample occasion to become acquainted with their powers of seduction by his own illicit inclinations. In the manner in which women are painted by Euripides, we may observe upon the whole a great deal of sensibility, even

for the more noble charms of female modesty, but no true respect.

The substantial freedom with respect to the manner of treating the fables, which was one of the prerogatives of the tragic art, is frequently carried by Euripides to the most licentious extreme. We know that the fables of Hyginus, which differ so essentially from those which are generally received, were partly extracted from his pieces. As he frequently rejected all the circumstances which were generally known, and to which the people were accustomed, he was reduced to the necessity of explaining in a prologue the situation of things in his drama, and the course which they take. Lessing, in his *Dramaturgie*, has pronounced a singular enough opinion; he thinks that it is a proof of an advance in the dramatic art, that Euripides gave himself wholly up to the effect of situations, without calculating on the excitement of curiosity. But I cannot see why the uncertainty of expectation, amidst the impressions which a dramatic poem produces, should not be allowed a legitimate place in such a work. The objection that a piece will only please in this manner for the first time, because on an acquaintance with it we know the result before hand, may be easily answered: if the representation is at all powerful, it will always arrest the attention of the spectator in such a manner, that he will forget what he already knew, and be again excited to the same height of expectation. Moreover, these prologues give the commencement

of the pieces of Euripides a very uniform and monotonous appearance; nothing can have a more awkward effect than for a person to come forward and say, I am so and so; this and that has happened, and the following will still take place. It resembles the labels in the mouths of the figures in old pictures, which could only be excusable in the great simplicity of style in ancient times. But then all the rest ought to correspond, which is by no means the case with Euripides, where the characters always discourse in the latest tone of the then existing manners. Both in his prologues and catastrophes he is exceedingly liberal of insignificant appearances of the gods, who are only elevated above men by the machine in which they are suspended, and whom we should never otherwise suspect for divinities.

The manner of the ancient tragedians, who combined every thing in large masses, and exhibited repose and motion distinctly contrasted with each other, was carried by him to an unwarrantable extreme. At one time, for the sake of giving spirit to his dialogue, he carries the practice observed by his predecessors, of giving a succession of speeches in single verses, to such an immoderate length, that questions and answers, or objections and reflections, fly about like arrows, and many of them so unnecessary that the half of these lines might well be spared. At another time he pours himself out in endless speeches, where he endeavours to give a brilliant display of his oratorical powers in ingenious arguments, or in the excitation of compassion. Many

of his scenes have altogether the appearance of a lawsuit, where two persons opposed to each other, with a third for a judge, do not even confine themselves to what their situation requires, but expatiate in a wide field, accusing their adversary, and defending themselves with all the turns and involutions which are usual with advocates and sycophants. In this manner the poet endeavours to make his poetry entertaining to the Athenians, from its resemblance to their favourite daily occupation of conducting, deciding, or at least listening to, lawsuits. Hence Quintilian expressly recommends him to the young orator, and with great justice, as capable of furnishing him with more instruction than the older tragedians. But such a recommendation is by no means highly honourable to him; for eloquence may no doubt have a place in the drama when it is suited to the character and the object of the person who speaks; but if rhetoric supplies the place of the immediate expression of emotion, it ceases to be poetical.

The style of Euripides is upon the whole too loose, although he has many happy images and ingenious turns: it has neither the dignity nor the energy of the style of *Æschylus*, nor the chaste sweetness of that of *Sophocles*. In his expressions he frequently affects the singular and uncommon, though at other times he becomes too familiar, and the tone of the discourse assumes a confidential appearance, and descends from the elevation of the cothurnus to the level ground. In this respect, as well as in the picture of several characteristic peculiarities, bordering on the lu-

dicrous (for instance, the unsuitable behaviour of Pentheus in a female dress, the gluttony of Hercules, and his immoderate claims on the hospitality of Admetus), Euripides was a precursor of the new comedy, to which he had an evident inclination, as he frequently paints the men and manners of his own times under the names of the heroic ages. Hence Menander expressed a most marked admiration for him, and proclaimed himself his scholar; and we have a fragment of Philémon which displays such an extravagant admiration, that it hardly appears to have been seriously meant. "If the dead," he either himself says, or allows one of his characters to say, "were still to have feeling, as some people suppose, I should hang myself for the sake of seeing Euripides."—The opinion of Aristophanes, his contemporary, forms a striking contrast with this adoration of the later comic authors. Aristophanes persecutes him unceasingly with the utmost bitterness, he seems as if he were appointed to be his constant scourge, that none of his moral or poetical extravagances might remain unpunished. Although Aristophanes, as a comic poet, is, generally speaking, in the relation of parody to the tragedians, yet he never attacks Sophocles, and even where he takes the part of Æschylus, at which we can hardly help smiling, his reverence for him is still visible; and he takes every opportunity of contrasting his gigantic powers with the petty refinement of Euripides. He has exposed the sophistical subtilty, the rhetorical and philosophical pretensions, the im-

rality and seductive effeminacy, and the excitations to undisguised sensuality, of Euripides, with all the powers of understanding, and with an inexhaustible flow of wit. As the modern critics have generally however considered Aristophanes in no other light than an extravagant and libellous farce writer, and have not been able to understand the truths which he veiled under his amusing disguises, they have paid but little attention to his opinion.

Notwithstanding these observations, we must never forget that Euripides was still a Grecian, and the contemporary of many of the greatest names of Greece in politics, philosophy, history, and the plastic arts. If, on comparing him with his predecessors, we must rank him far beneath them, he appears still great when placed by the side of many of the moderns. He has a particular strength in portraying the errors of a diseased soul, pursuing even to madness the passions of which it is the slave. He is admirable where the object calls chiefly for emotion, and requires the display of no higher qualities; and he is still more so where pathos and moral beauty are united. Few of his pieces are without particular passages of the most overpowering beauty. It is by no means my intention to deny him the possession of the most astonishing talents; I have only stated that these talents were not united with a mind in which the austerity of moral principles, and the sanctity of religious feelings, were held in the highest honour.

The relation in which Euripides stood to his two great predecessors, may be placed in the

clearest light by a comparison of the three pieces which we fortunately possess on the same subject, namely, the avenging murder of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes.

The scene of the *Choephora* of *Æschylus* is before the royal palace; the grave of Agamemnon appears on the stage. Orestes is seen with his faithful Pylades, and opens the play (which is unfortunately somewhat mutilated at the commencement), at the sepulchre, with a prayer to Mercury, and with an invocation to his father, in which he promises to avenge him, and to whom he consecrates a lock. He sees a female train in mourning weeds issue from the palace, who bring a libation to the grave; and, as he thinks he recognises his sister among them, he retires with Pylades that he may first overhear them. The chorus, which consists of captive Trojan virgins, reveals with mournful gestures the occasion of its mission, namely, a dreadful dream of Clytemnestra; it adds obscure forebodings of the impending revenge for the bloody crime, and bewails its lot in being obliged to serve unworthy superiors. Electra asks the chorus if they mean to fulfil the commission of her hostile mother, or if they are to pour out their offering in silence; and in compliance with their advice, she also offers up a prayer to the subterranean Mercury and the soul of her father, in her own name and that of the absent Orestes, that he may appear and avenge him. In pouring out the offering she joins in the lamentations of the chorus for the departed.

She then conjectures, from finding a lock of hair resembling her own in colour, and seeing footsteps near the grave, that her brother has been there; and when she is almost frantic with joy at the thought, her brother steps forward and discovers himself. He soon overcomes her doubts by exhibiting to her a tissue woven by herself: they give themselves up to their joy; he addresses a prayer to Jupiter, and makes known that Apollo has called on him, under the most dreadful threats of persecution from the furies of his father, to destroy those who were guilty of his death in the same manner in which he was destroyed, namely, by guile and cunning. We have now hymns on the part of the chorus and Electra; which consist of prayers to her father's shade and the subterranean divinities, and a recapitulation of the motives for the deed, especially those derived from the death of Agamemnon. Orestes inquires into the vision which induced Clytemnestra to offer the libation, and hears that she dreamt that she gave her breast to a dragon in her son's cradle, and suckled it with her blood. He now resolves to become the dragon, and announces more distinctly his intention of stealing into the house as a disguised stranger, and attacking both her and Ægisthus by surprize. With this view he withdraws along with Pylades. The subject of the next choral hymn is the boundless audacity of men in general, and especially of women in their illicit passions, confirmed by the most terrible mythical examples, and the avenging justice which always

at last overtakes them. Orestes returns as a stranger with Pylades, and desires admission into the palace. Clytemnestra comes out, and when she learns from him the death of Orestes, at which Electra assumes a feigned grief, she invites him to enter and partake of their hospitality. After a short prayer of the chorus, the nurse comes and mourns her foster child; the chorus inspires her with some hopes of his being still in life, and advises her to contrive to bring Ægisthus to Clytemnestra without his body guard. On the approaching aspect of danger, the chorus proffers prayers to Jupiter and Mercury for the success of the deed. Ægisthus enters in conversation with the messenger, can hardly allow himself to be persuaded of the truth of the joyful news of the death of Orestes, and hastens into the house for the purpose of ascertaining it, from whence, after a short prayer of the chorus, we hear the cries of the murdered. A servant rushes out, and gives the alarm at the door of the female dwelling, to warn Clytemnestra. She hears it, comes forward, and demands an axe to defend herself; but as Orestes rushes instantaneously on her with the bloody sword, her courage fails her, and she holds up to him the maternal breast in the most moving manner. Hesitating in his purpose, he asks the counsel of Pylades, who in a few lines exhorts him by the most cogent reasons to persist; after an alternation of accusation and defence, he pursues her into the house, that he may sacrifice her beside the body of Ægisthus. The chorus re-

joices in a grave hymn at the completion of the retaliation. The great door of the palace opens, and exhibits in the inside the two dead bodies on one bed. Orestes orders the servants to unfold the capacious vestment in which his father was entangled when he was slain, that it may be seen by all the beholders; the chorus recognise the bloody spots in it, and mourn afresh the murder of Agamemnon. Orestes, while he feels that his mind is becoming confused, lays hold of an opportunity of justifying himself; he declares his intention of repairing to Delphi to purify himself from the bloody deed, and flies with terror from the furies of his mother, whom the chorus does not perceive, but conceives to be a mere phantom of his imagination, but who nevertheless will no longer allow him any repose. The chorus concludes with a reflection on the threefold scene of murder in the royal palace, since the repast of Thyestes.

The scene of the *Electra* of *Sophocles* is also laid before the palace, but does not contain the grave of Agamemnon. At break of day Pylades, Orestes, and the guardian by whom he was preserved when his father was slain, enter the stage as arriving from another country. The tutor who acts as his guide commences with a description of his native city, and he is answered by Orestes who mentions the commission of Apollo, and the manner in which he intends to carry it into execution, after which the young man puts up a prayer to his domestic gods and

his father's house. Electra is heard complaining within; Orestes is desirous of greeting her without delay, but the old man leads him away to perform a sacrifice at the grave of his father. Electra then appears, and pours out her sorrow in a pathetic address to heaven, and her unconquerable desire of revenge in a prayer to the infernal deities. The chorus, which consists of native virgins, endeavours to console her; and, in an interchange of hymns and conversation, Electra discloses her deep sorrow, the ignominy and oppression under which she suffers, and her hopelessness from the delay of Orestes, whom she has frequently admonished; and she turns a deaf ear to all the grounds of consolation adduced by the chorus. Chrysothemis, the younger daughter of Clytemnestra, whose yieldingness of disposition naturally renders her the favourite of her mother, approaches with a mortuary offering which she is carrying to the grave of her father. An altercation arises between the two sisters respecting their difference of sentiment, and Chrysothemis mentions to Electra that Ægisthus, whom she sets at defiance, and who is at that time absent in the country, has determined to adopt the most severe measures towards her. She then learns that Clytemnestra dreamt of the return of Agamemnon to life, of his having planted his sceptre in the ground on which the house stood, which grew up to a tree that overshadowed the whole land; and, alarmed at this, that she has commissioned Chrysothemis to carry an oblation

to his grave. Electra counsels her not to execute the commands of her audacious mother, but to put up a prayer for herself and her sister, and for the return of Orestes to revenge her father, when she reaches the grave; she adds to the oblation her own girdle and a lock of her hair. Chrysothemis goes off, promising obedience to her wishes. The chorus predicts from the dream, that retaliation is at hand, and connects the crimes in the house of Pelops, with the first enormity committed by that ancestor. Clytemnestra rebukes her daughter, against whom however she is milder than usual, probably from the effect of the dream; she defends her murder of Agamemnon, Electra condemns her for it, but yet no violent altercation takes place. Clytemnestra then proffers a prayer at the altar before the house to Apollo for health and long life, and in secret for the death of her son. The guardian of Orestes arrives, and, as the messenger of a Phocæan friend, announces the death of Orestes, and minutely enumerates all the circumstances which attended his being killed in a chariot-race at the Pythian games. Clytemnestra can scarcely conceal her triumphant joy, although she is at first visited by the feelings of a mother, and she invites the messenger to partake their hospitality. Electra, in affecting speeches and hymns, gives herself up to her grief, and the chorus in vain endeavours to console her. Chrysothemis returns from the grave, full of joy in the assurance that Orestes is in the vicinity: she has found his lock of hair, his liba-

tion, and garland. The despair of Electra is now renewed; she recounts to her sister the gloomy relation of the supposed messenger, and exhorts her, as all their hopes are at an end, to join in the daring deed of destroying Ægisthus, a determination which Chrysothemis, who does not possess resolution enough, rejects as foolish; and after a violent altercation she enters the house. The chorus now bewails Electra, who is thus left altogether destitute. Orestes returns with Pylades and several servants bearing an urn with the pretended ashes of the deceased. Electra supplicates him for the urn, and laments over it in the most affecting language, which agitates Orestes to such a degree that he can no longer conceal himself: after some preparation he discloses himself to her, and confirms his account by the production of the seal-ring of their father. She gives expression to her boundless joy in speeches and odes, till the guardian comes out, and reprimands both of them for their want of consideration. Electra with some difficulty recognizes in him the faithful servant to whom she had entrusted the care of Orestes, and expresses her gratitude to him. At the suggestion of the guardian, Orestes and Pylades accompany him with all speed into the house, that they may surprise Clytemnestra while still alone. Electra offers up a prayer for them to Apollo; the choral ode announces the moment of retaliation. We hear in the house the cries of the affrighted Clytemnestra, her short prayer, her wailings, when

she feels herself wounded. Electra from without stimulates Orestes to complete the deed, and he comes out with bloody hands; as the chorus however sees Ægisthus advancing, he re-enters the house in haste for the purpose of surprising him. Ægisthus inquires into the death of Orestes, and is led to believe from the ambiguous language of Electra that his corpse is in the palace. He commands all the gates to be thrown open, immediately, for the purpose of convincing those inhabitants who yielded obedience with reluctance to his sovereignty, that they had no longer any hopes in Orestes. The middle entrance opens, and exhibits in the interior of the palace a body lying on the bed covered over: Orestes stands beside the body, and invites Ægisthus to uncover it; and he now beholds the bloody corpse of Clytemnestra, and concludes himself lost beyond remedy. He requests to be allowed to speak, but this is opposed by Electra. Orestes constrains him to enter the house, that he may kill him on the very spot where his own father was murdered.

The scene of the *Electra* of Euripides is not in Mycenæ, but on the borders of the territory of Argos, in the open country, and before a solitary and miserable cot. The owner, an old countryman, comes out and relates in a prologue to the spectators the concerns of the royal house, as already in part related, with the addition however, that not contented with treating Electra with ignominy, and leaving her in a state of celibacy, they

had forced her to marry beneath her rank, and to accept of him for a husband: the motives for this proceeding, as stated by him, are singular enough; he affirms however that he entertains too much respect for her to reduce her to the humiliation of becoming in reality his wife.— They live therefore in a virgin marriage. Electra comes before it is yet break of day, bearing a water pitcher upon her head, and with her hair close cut in the servile manner: her husband entreats her not to torment herself with labours like these to which she had not been accustomed, but she will not be withheld from the discharge of her duty as the mistress of a house; and both separate, he to his field-labours, and she to her occupations. Orestes now enters with Pylades, and discloses in a speech to him, that he had already sacrificed at the grave of his father, but durst not enter the town, and that he wished to discover his married sister, whom he knew to dwell somewhere at hand on the frontiers, that he might learn from her the state of affairs. He sees Electra approach with the water pitcher, and retires. In an ode she laments her own fate and that of her father. The chorus, consisting of rustic virgins, makes its appearance, and exhorts her to take a part in a festival of Juno, which she however in her poverty and depression, pointing to her ragged clothes, will not consent to. The chorus offer to lend her their festal ornaments, but she still refuses. She perceives Orestes and Pylades in their hiding-place, takes them

for robbers, and wishes to escape into the house; when Orestes steps forward and prevents her, she imagines he intends to murder her; he tranquillizes her, and communicates the news of Orestes being in life. On this he inquires into her situation, and the spectators are again refreshed with an account of the whole circumstances. Orestes still restrains from disclosing himself, promises however to communicate any message from Electra to her brother, and testifies such an interest in her situation as might be expected from a stranger. The chorus on this occasion becomes impatient to learn something from the city; and Electra, after describing her own distress, paints the luxury and arrogance of her mother and Ægisthus, who amuse themselves with coursing over Agamemnon's grave, and throwing stones at it. The peasant returns from labour, and finds it rather indecorous that his wife should be prating with young men, but when he hears that they bring news of Orestes, he invites them in a friendly manner into his house. Orestes, on witnessing the behaviour of the worthy man, makes the reflection that the most respectable people are frequently to be found in low stations, and in lowly garb. Electra upbraids her husband on account of the invitation, as he knew they had nothing in the house; he is of opinion that the strangers will be satisfied with what he has, that a good house-wife can always make the most of things, and that they have at least more than a day's provisions. She dis-

patches him to the old guardian and deliverer of Orestes, who lives in the country beside them, that he may come and bring something with him to entertain the strangers. The peasant, as he leaves them, utters sentences respecting riches and moderation. The chorus soar in an ode to the expedition of the Greeks to Troy, describe at great length the figures of a shield, which Achilles received from Thetis, and conclude with expressing a wish that Clytemnestra may be punished for her audacious crime.

The old guardian, who with no small difficulty mounts up to the house, brings Electra a lamb, a cheese, and some wine; he then begins to weep, and does not fail to wipe his eyes with his tattered garments. To the questions of Electra he answers, that at the grave of Agamemnon he found traces of an oblation and a lock of hair, and he thence conjectured that Orestes had been there. We have then an allusion to the means which in Æschylus are made to lead to the discovery, the resemblance of the locks, the print of the feet, and the tissue, with a refutation of them. The probability of this part of the drama of Æschylus may perhaps admit of justification, and at all events we are disposed to overlook it; but the express reference to another representation of the same subject, is the most foreign and destructive to genuine poetry of all measures that can possibly be conceived. The guests come out; the old man considers Orestes with attention, recognizes him, and convinces Electra by a scar

above his eyebrow which he received from a fall (a most noble invention, which he substitutes in place of that of Æschylus), that he is her brother; they embrace one another, and give themselves up to their joy during a short choral ode. In a long dialogue, Orestes, the old man, and Electra, form a plan for the execution of the deed. The old man informs them that Ægisthus is at present in the country sacrificing to the nymphs, and there Orestes resolves to steal as a guest, and to fall on him. Clytemnestra, from a dread of the unpleasant language which she might be obliged to hear, has not accompanied her husband; and Electra undertakes to entice her mother to make her appearance, by the false report of her being in child-bed. The brother and sister now join in prayers to the gods for a successful issue of their plan. Electra declares that she will put an end to her existence if it fails, and that she will keep a sword in readiness for that purpose. The old man goes off with Orestes to conduct him to Ægisthus, and afterwards to repair to Clytemnestra. The chorus sings the golden ram, which Thyestes, by the assistance of the faithless wife of Atreus, was enabled to carry off from him; and the repast of his own children, with which he was punished in return; a sight at which the sun turned aside from his course; but this circumstance, however, the chorus very wisely adds, that it was very much inclined to call in question. Groans and tumultuous voices are heard at a distance; Electra conceives that her

brother has been overcome, and determines on killing herself. But immediately a messenger arrives, who gives a long-winded account of the destruction of Ægisthus, interlarded with many a joke. Amidst the rejoicings of the chorus, Electra crowns her brother with flowers, who holds the head of Ægisthus by the hair in his hands. She in a long speech upbraids this head with its follies and crimes, and among other things observes to it: no man will ever thrive who marries a woman with whom he formerly lived in illicit intercourse; that it is indecorous when a woman obtains the mastery in a house, &c. Clytemnestra is seen to approach; Orestes begins to have scruples of conscience respecting his intention of murdering his mother, and the propriety of obeying the oracle, but yields to the arguments of Electra, and agrees to execute his purpose within the house. The queen arrives drawn in a chariot sumptuously hung with tapestry, and surrounded by Trojan slaves; Electra wishes to assist her in alighting, but this she refuses. She then urges the sacrifice of Iphigenia as a justification of her conduct towards Agamemnon, and calls even upon her daughter to state her reasons against the act, that an opportunity may be given to the latter of delivering a subtle discourse, in which, among other things, she reproaches her mother with having, during the absence of Agamemnon, sat too much before her glass; and paid greater attention to her dress than was proper. Clytemnestra is not angry, although

her daughter does not hesitate to announce the intention of murdering her if possible; she makes inquiries respecting the child-birth, and enters the hut that she may perform the sacrifice of purification. Electra accompanies her with a speech of derision. On this the chorus begins an ode on the retaliation: the cries of Clytemnestra are heard, and the brother and sister come out stained with blood. They are full of repentance and despair at the deed which they have committed, become agitated by a repetition of the miserable language and gestures of their mother, Orestes determines on flight, and Electra asks: who will now take her in marriage? Castor and Pollux, their uncles, appear in the air, abuse Apollo on account of his oracle, command Orestes to secure himself from the furies by submission to the tribunal of the Areopagus, and predict a number of events which will happen to him. They then establish a marriage between Electra and Pylades; her first husband is to go to Phocis, where he is to be richly provided for. After a renewal of their lamentations, the brother and sister take leave of one another for life, and the piece concludes.

We easily perceive that Æschylus has viewed the subject in its most terrible aspect, and drawn it within the dominion of the dark divinities, into which he so willingly entered. The grave of Agamemnon is the obscure point, from which the vindictory retaliation of Agamemnon issues; his discontented shade, the soul of the whole

poem. The external ~~imperfection~~ so easily remarked, that the piece remains too long at the same point, without any perceptible progress, is atoned for by a true internal perfection: for it is the bodily stillness of expectation before a storm or an earthquake. It is true the prayers are sometimes repeated, but their number produces the impression of a great and unheard of purpose, for which human strength and human motives are not alone sufficient. In the murder of Clytemnestra, and her heart-rending appeal, the poet has gone to the very extremity of what may be allowed to feeling, without taking the part of the criminal. As the crime which is to be punished is from the very beginning kept in view by the grave, it is brought still nearer to our minds towards the conclusion, by the exhibition of the vestment: Agamemnon, after being fully avenged, is as it were still murdered in representation. The flight of Orestes betrays no unsuitable repentance or weakness, but is merely the inevitable tribute which he is forced to pay to offended nature.

It is only necessary to draw the attention generally to the admirable arrangement of Sophocles. What a beautiful introduction precedes, in him, the mission of the queen to the grave, with which ~~Æschylus~~ *Æschylus* at once begins! How beautifully he has adorned the relation of the Pythian games! What wonderful judgment in the prolongation of the pathos of Electra: first her general lamentations, then the hopes which she derives from

the dream, the annihilation of these hopes by the news of the death, the new and rejected hopes of Chrysothemis, and lastly her wailings over the urn. The heroism of Electra is beautifully contrasted with the irresolution of her sister. The poet has given altogether a new turn to the subject, by making Electra the chief object of our interest. In this noble pair he has given to the female an unshaken constancy in true and noble sentiments, and the heroism of suffering, and to the male he has imparted all the becoming energy of a young hero. The circumspection and experience of the old man are again opposed to their youthful warmth; that Pylades in the works of both poets is silent, is a proof how much in ancient art every thing unnecessary and superfluous was held in aversion.

But that which more particularly characterizes the tragedy of Sophocles, is the celestial purity, the fresh breath of life and youth, which is diffused over so dreadful a subject. The bright divinity, Apollo, who commanded the deed, appears to have shed his influence over it; even the break of day at the commencement is significant. The grave, and the world of shadows, are kept in the distance: what in Æschylus is effected by the spirit of the murdered monarch, proceeds here from the mind of the still existing Electra, which is endowed with an equal capacity for inextinguishable hatred and ardent love. The disposition to avoid every thing dark and ominous, is remarkable even in the very first

speech of Orestes, when he says it does not grieve him to be reputed dead, when he feels himself alive in the fulness of health and strength. He is neither beset with doubts nor stings of conscience, either before or after the deed, so that here the purpose is more determined than in *Æschylus*; and the appalling scene with *Ægisthus*, and the reserving him for an ignominious execution at the conclusion, is conceived with more austerity than in the other drama. The nocturnal vision of *Clytemnestra* affords the most striking image of the relation which the two poets bear to each other: both are equally suitable, significant, and ominous; that of *Æschylus* is grander, but appalling to the senses, that of *Sophocles* majestically beautiful, even in terror.

The piece of *Euripides* affords a singular example of poetic, or rather unpoetic, perversity; we should never have done, were we to attempt to point out all the improbable and unnecessary circumstances, and all the contradictions, which are contained in it. Why, for instance, does *Orestes* fruitlessly torment his sister so long without disclosing himself? The poet has an easy task, when he has nothing more to do than to throw aside whatever stands in his way, as in the case of the peasant, of whom, after the departure of the guardian, we have no farther account. For the sake of appearing original, and from an idea, that to make *Orestes* kill the king and queen in the middle of their capital was not consistent with probability, *Euripides* has in-

volved himself in much greater improbabilities. Whatever there is of tragical in his drama is not his own, but belongs either to the fable or the labour of his predecessors. It becomes no tragedy in his hands, but is wrought down to a family picture, in the modern signification of the word. The effect produced by the poverty of *Electra* is pitiful in the extreme: the poet has betrayed his secret in the contentment with which she bears her wretchedness. All the preparations for the deed are marked by levity, and a want of internal conviction: it is downright torture to exhibit *Ægisthus* displaying a good-natured hospitality, and *Clytemnestra* sympathizing with her daughter, that even compassion may be excited in their favour; the deed, immediately after the execution, is again extinguished by the most weak repentance, a repentance which arises from no moral feeling, but merely from a commotion of the senses. I shall say nothing of his abuse of the oracle of Delphi. As it has destroyed the whole drama, I cannot see why *Euripides* should have written it, except to provide a fortunate marriage for *Electra*, and to reward the peasant for his forbearance. I could wish that the marriage of *Pylades* had been completed, and that a sum of money had been paid to the peasant; and then every thing would have ended to the satisfaction of the spectators, as in an ordinary comedy.

That I may not however appear unjust, I must confess that the *Electra* is perhaps the very worst

of his whole pieces. Was it the rage for novelty which led him into such an error? He was truly to be pitied for having been preceded in the same subject by two such men as Sophocles and Æschylus. But who compelled him to measure his powers with them, and to think even of writing an *Electra*?

We can give only a short account of some of the great number of pieces of Euripides, which have come down to us.

On the score of beautiful morality, there is none of them perhaps so deserving of praise as *Alceste*. Her determination to die, and the farewell which she takes of her husband and children, are represented with the most overpowering pathos. His moderation in not allowing the heroine to speak on her being brought back from the world below, that he might not draw aside the mysterious veil from the condition of the dead, is deserving of high praise: *Admetus* it is true, and more especially his father, sink too much in our estimation from their selfish love of life; and *Hercules* appears, at first, coarse even to rudeness, afterwards more noble and worthy of himself, and at last jovial, when, for the sake of the joke, he introduces to *Admetus* his veiled wife as a new bride.

Iphigenia in Aulis is a subject peculiarly suited to the inclinations and powers of Euripides; the object here is to excite a tender emotion for the innocent and unsuspecting youth of the heroine: but *Iphigenia* is still far from being an *Antigone*.

Aristotle has already remarked that the character is not sustained: "Iphigenia, when she implores her life, by no means resembles the Iphigenia who afterwards yields herself up a willing sacrifice."

Ion is also one of his most delightful pieces, on account of the pictures of innocence and priestly sanctity in the boy whose name it bears. In the course of the plot, it is true, there are not a few improbabilities, deficiencies, and repetitions; and the catastrophe produced by a falsehood, in which both gods and men unite against Xuthus, can hardly be satisfactory to our feelings.

In the representation of female passions, and the errors of a diseased mind, the *Phædra* and *Medea* have been deservedly praised. The former of these pieces dazzles us by the sublime and beautiful heroism of *Hippolytus*; and it is also deserving of the highest commendation on account of the observation of propriety and moral strictness, in a subject of so critical a nature. This however is not so much the merit of the poet as the result of the delicacy of feeling of his contemporaries; for the *Hippolytus* which we possess, according to the testimony of the scholiast, is an improvement upon an earlier one, in which there were traits of a repulsive and censurable nature.*

* The learned and acute Brunck, without citing any authority, or the coincidence of a fragment in corroboration, says that Seneca in his *Hippolytus* followed the plan of the first of Euripides, which was called the *Veiled Hippolytus*.—

The commencement of *Medea* is admirable; her desperate situation is depicted in the conversation between her nurse and the tutor of her children, and in her own heart-rending wailings behind the scene. As soon however as she makes her appearance, the poet takes care to cool our agitation by the number of general and commonplace reflections which he puts into her mouth. She appears still less deserving of our respect in the scene with *Ægeus*, in which, having in contemplation a terrible revenge on Jason, she first secures to herself a place of refuge, and seems almost on the point of hinting at a new alliance. This is very unlike the daring criminal who subjected the powers of nature to a subserviency to her ungovernable passions, and who flew from land to land like a desolating meteor;—the *Medea* who, abandoned by all the world, found sufficient resources in herself. Nothing but a predilection for Athenian antiquities could induce Euripides to adopt this cold substitution. He would otherwise have painted, in the most vivid colours, the union in the same person of the powerful enchantress and the weak woman, in her sexual relations. As it is, we are keenly affected by the display of maternal tenderness in the midst of the preparations for the cruel deed. She announces

How far this is mere conjecture I cannot say, but yet I should be inclined to doubt whether Euripides, even in the drama which was censured, admitted the scene of the declaration of love, which Racine however has not hesitated to adopt from Seneca into his *Phædra*.

however her purpose much too soon, and in too definite a manner, instead of allowing us to guess at her intentions from the ominous expressions which might escape from a dark and perturbed mind. When she executes it, the impulse of revenge on Jason ought to have been already sufficiently gratified by the ignominious death of his young wife and her father; and the new motive that Jason would infallibly murder the children, and that she must therefore anticipate him, will by no means bear examination: for she could as easily have saved the living children with herself, as have carried off their dead bodies in the dragon-chariot. Still however this may perhaps be justified by the perturbation of mind into which she was plunged by the completion of the crime.

Such a picture of universal sorrow, of the fall of flourishing families and states from the greatest glory to the lowest necessity, and even to entire annihilation, as that which is exhibited in the *Troades*, might obtain for Euripides, from Aristotle, the name of the most tragic of poets. The conclusion, when the captive women, allotted to their different masters, leave Troy in flames behind them, and proceed towards the ships, is truly grand. It is impossible however for a piece to have less action, in the energetical sense of the word: it is a series of situations and events, which have no other connexion than that they are all derived from the conquest of Troy, but they have in no respect a common aim. The

accumulation of helpless suffering, without even an opposition of sentiment, at last wearies us, and exhausts our compassion. The greater the effort to avert a calamity, the greater the impression it afterwards produces, when it bursts through the restraint. But when so little concern is shown, as is here the case with Astyanax, for the speech of Talthymbius himself does not betray the slightest attempt to save him, the spectator soon acquiesces in like manner. In this way Euripides frequently fails. In the uninterrupted demands on our compassion in this piece, the pathos is not duly economised, and gradually heightened: for instance, the lamentation of Andromache for her living son is much more heart-rending than that of Hecuba for her son that is dead. The effect of the latter is however supported by the aspect of the small corse in the shield of Hector. Much was calculated on the visual attractions of the piece: hence Helen appears splendidly dressed for the sake of contrast with the captive slaves, Andromache is mounted on a chariot laden with spoils; and I doubt not but that, at the conclusion, the whole decorations were exhibited in flames. The trial of Helen interrupts our compassion by an idle altercation, which ends in nothing; for notwithstanding the accusation of Hecuba, Menelaus abides by the resolution which he had before formed. The defence of Helen may be considered as capable of affording nearly the same degree of entertainment which we derive

from the sophistical eulogium of Isocrates in her favour.

It was not enough for Euripides to have represented Hecuba throughout a whole piece in sackcloth and ashes, and pouring out her lamentations; he has still introduced her as the principal figure in another tragedy, which bears her name. The two actions of this piece, the sacrifice of Polyxena, and the revenge of Polymestor, on account of the murder of Polydorus, have nothing in common with each other but their connexion with Hecuba. The first half possesses great beauties, of the kind in which Euripides is chiefly successful: pictures of tender youth, female innocence, and noble resignation to an early and violent death. A human sacrifice, the triumph of barbaric superstition, is represented as executed, suffered, and beheld, with that Hellenism of feeling, which among the Greeks effected at so early a period the abolition of such sacrifices. But the second half destroys these soft impressions in a highly repulsive manner. It is filled with the revengeful artifices of Hecuba, the blind avarice of Polymestor, and the paltry politics of Agamemnon, who dares not venture on calling the Thracian king to account, but who nevertheless delivers him into the hands of his captive women. Neither is it very suitable that Hecuba, advanced in years, bereft of strength, and overwhelmed with sorrow, should display so much presence of mind in the execution of her revenge,

and such a command of tongue in her accusation and her derision of Polymestor.

We have another example of two distinct and separate actions in the same tragedy, the *Raging Hercules*. The first is the oppression of his family during his absence, and their deliverance through his return; the second, his repentance after the sudden madness, during which he murdered his wife and children. The two actions follow, but by no means arise out of one another.

The *Phænissæ* is rich in tragical events, in the common acceptation of the word: the son of Creon, to save the town, precipitates himself from the walls; Eteocles and Polynices perish by the hands of each other; Jocasta falls by her own hand over their dead bodies; the Argives who advance against Thebes are destroyed in battle; Polynices remains uninterred; and lastly, *Œdipus* and *Antigone* are driven out to banishment.—After this enumeration, the scholiast remarks the arbitrary manner, in which the poet has proceeded. “This drama,” says he, “is beautiful in theatrical representation, because it is full of foreign incidents. *Antigone* looking down from the walls has nothing to do with the action, and *Polynices*, under the protection of a cessation of hostilities, enters the town without any effect being thereby produced. Among these superfluities, the addition of the exiled *Œdipus*, with a loquacious ode, is pre-eminently without an object.” This is a severe sentence, but it is just.

The scholiast on *Orestes* is not more lenient:

"The piece is one of those which produce a great effect on the stage, but which is extremely defective in the characters; for, with the exception of Pylades, all the rest are worth nothing." Moreover, "It has a catastrophe more suitable to comedy than tragedy." This drama begins indeed in the most agitating manner. Orestes, after the murder of his mother, is represented lying on his bed, afflicted with anguish of soul and delirium; Electra sits at his feet, and she and the chorus remain in trembling expectation of his awaking. Afterwards however every thing takes a perverse turn, and ends with the most forced theatrical contrivances.

The piece of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, in which the fate of Orestes is still further followed out, appears less wild and extravagant, but it seldom rises above mediocrity in the representation either of character or passion. The mutual recognition of brother and sister, after such adventures and actions, when Iphigenia, who formerly herself trembled at the bloody altar, was on the point of yielding up her brother to a similar fate, does not however produce more than a transient emotion. The flight of Orestes and his sister is not highly calculated to excite our interest: the artifice by which it is effected by Iphigenia, is willingly credited by Thoas, who does not attempt to give any opposition, till both are safe, and then he is reduced to silence by an ordinary appearance of the gods towards the conclusion. This means has been so used and abused by

Euripides, that of his eighteen tragedies, in nine of them a divinity descends for the full unraveling of the catastrophe.

In *Andromache* Orestes makes his appearance for the fourth time. The scholiast, in whose opinions we think that we can generally recognize the sentiments of the most important of ancient critics, declares this a piece of the second rank in which he can only praise single scenes. Among those which Racine has adopted as the foundation of his free imitations, we can have no difficulty in recognizing the very worst parts of the work, and therefore the French critics have an easy victory in their endeavours to depreciate the Grecian predecessor, from whom Racine has in fact derived little more than the first suggestion of his tragedy.

The Bacchæ represent the infectious and tumultuous inspiration of the worship of Bacchus, with great sensual power and vividness of conception. The obstinate disbelief of Pentheus, his blindness, and dreadful punishment by the hands of his own mother, form a bold picture. The effect on the stage must be extraordinary.—Imagine, only, a chorus with flying and dishevelled hair and dresses, tambourines, cymbals, &c. in their hands, like the Bacchantes on bas-reliefs, raving up and down the orchestra, and executing their inspired dances amidst tumultuous music, which was altogether unusual, as the choral odes were generally delivered with a solemn step, and without any other accompaniment than a flute.

Here the luxuriance of ornament, which Euripides always affects, was for once in its proper place. When therefore several of the modern critics attempt to depreciate this piece, and to assign to it a very low rank, they do not seem to me to know what they themselves would wish. I cannot help admiring in the composition of this piece, the harmony and unity which we so seldom observe in Euripides, the abstinence from every thing foreign to the subject, so that all the effects and all the motives flow from one source, and contribute to one object. After *Hippolytus*, I should be inclined to assign the first place to this among all the remaining works of Euripides.

The *Heraclidæ* and the *Supplikes* are true occasional tragedies, and could only be successful from their flattery of the Athenians. They celebrate two ancient heroic deeds of Athens, on which the eulogistic orator, Isocrates, who always mixed up the fabulous with the historical, lays an astonishingly great stress: the protection of the children of Hercules, the ancestors of the Lacedæmonian kings, from the persecution of Eurystheus, and the interment of the Seven before Thebes and their army, gained in favour of Adrastus, king of Argos, by a victory over the Thebans. The *Supplikes* were represented, as we know, during the Peloponnesian war, after the conclusion of a treaty between the Argives and the Lacedæmonians: this piece was intended to recall to the memory of the Argives their ancient obligation to Athens, and to show how little they could

hope to prosper in the war against the Athenians. The *Heraclidæ* was undoubtedly written with a similar view in respect to Lacedæmon. Of the two pieces however, which are both cast in the same mould, the *Female Suppliants*, so called from the mothers of the vanquished and fallen heroes, is by far the richest in poetical merit; the *Heraclidæ* appears, as it were, but a faint impression of the other. In the former piece, it is true, Theseus appears at first in a very unamiable light, as he upbraids the unfortunate Adrastus with his errors at too great length, and perhaps without much justice, before he condescends to assist him; the contest between Theseus and the Argive herald, respecting the precedency of monarchical or democratical constitutions, is justly banished from the stage to the schools of rhetoricians; and the moral eulogium of Adrastus over the fallen heroes is very much out of character. I am convinced that Euripides had here an intention of drawing the characters of particular Athenian generals, who had fallen in some battle. In a dramatic point of view however the passage will not admit of this justification; but without such an object it would have been silly and ridiculous, in describing those heroes of the age of Hercules, a Capaneus for instance, who set even heaven itself at defiance, to have launched out into the praise of their civic virtues. How much Euripides was disposed to wander out of his subject in quest of foreign allusions, even allusions to himself, we may see from a speech of Adrastus, who without any cause is made to say,

"It is not just that the poet, while he delights others with his works, should himself suffer inconvenience." However, the funeral dirges and the swan-song of Evadne are affectingly beautiful, although Evadne, in a literal sense, is introduced into the drama altogether unexpectedly.

The *Heraclida* is a very poor piece, and singularly bald towards the conclusion. We hear nothing more of the sacrifice of Macaria, after it is over: as the determination seems to cost herself no struggle, it makes as little impression upon others. The Athenian king, Demophon, does not return again; neither does Iolaus, the companion of Hercules and tutor of his children, whose youth is so wonderfully renewed: Hyllus, the heroic son of Hercules, never even makes his appearance; and nobody at last remains but Alcmena, who keeps quarrelling with Eurystheus. Euripides seems to have taken a particular pleasure in drawing such implacable and revengeful old women: he has exhibited Hecuba twice in this light, opposed to Helen and Polymester. The constant recurrence of the same means and motives is a sure symptom of mannerism. We have in the works of this poet three examples of the sacrifice of females, which are moving from their resignation: Iphigenia, Polyxena, and Macaria; the voluntary death of Alceste and Evadne, belong also in some sort to this class. Supplicants are in like manner a favourite subject with him, where the spectator is oppressed with apprehension lest they should be forcibly torn from the

sanctuary of the altar. I have already dwelt upon the introduction of deities towards the conclusion.

The most entertaining of all tragedies is *Helen*, a marvellous drama, full of wonderful adventures and appearances, which are evidently much more suited to comedy. The invention on which it is founded is, that Helen remained concealed in Egypt (so far the assertion of the Egyptian priests went), while Paris carried off an airy shape, which bore a resemblance to her, and about which the Greeks and Trojans fought with one another for ten years. By this contrivance the virtue of the heroine is saved, and Menelaus, in confirmation of the ridicule cast by Aristophanes on the beggary of the heroes of Euripides, appears in a ragged eleemosynary state, and is represented as perfectly satisfied. But this manner of improving mythology bears a resemblance to the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights.

Modern philologists have dedicated voluminous treatises, to prove the illegitimacy of *Rhesus*, the subject of which is taken from the eleventh book of the *Iliad*. Their opinion is, that the piece contains such a number of improbabilities and contradictions, that it is altogether unworthy of Euripides. But this is by no means a legitimate conclusion. Are not the faults which they censure unavoidably derived from the selection of a subject, so very inconvenient as a nightly enterprise? In a question respecting the legitimacy of any work, our concern is not so much with

its merit or demerit, as whether its style and peculiarities bear a resemblance to those of the pretended author. The few words of the scholiast amount to a very different opinion: "Some have considered this drama as illegitimate, and not the production of Euripides, for it bears more traces of the style of Sophocles. But it is inscribed in the *Didascalie* as legitimate, and the accuracy with respect to the appearances of the starry heaven betrays Euripides." I imagine I understand also what is meant by the style of Sophocles, which I do not indeed find in the general disposition, but in detached scenes. Hence, if the piece is to be taken from Euripides, I should be disposed to attribute it to an eclectic imitator, but rather of the school of Sophocles than of Euripides, and only a little later than the period of both. This I infer from the familiarity of many of the scenes, as tragedy was then inclining to the civic or familiar drama; for at a still later period in the Alexandrian time, it fell into an opposite error, that of bombast.

The *Cyclops* is a satirical drama. This is a mixed and secondary species of tragic poetry, which we have already in passing alluded to. The want of some relaxation for the mind, after the stern severity of tragedy, appears to have given rise to the satirical drama, as well as to after-pieces in general. The satirical drama never possessed an independent existence; it was given as an appendage to several tragedies, and from all that we can conjecture was always considerably

shorter. In external form it resembled tragedy, and the materials were in like manner mythological. The distinctive mark was a chorus consisting of satyrs, who accompanied such heroic adventures as were of a more cheerful hue, (many in the *Odyssey* for instance; for here also, as in many other respects, the germ is to be found in *Homer*,) or could be made to wear such an appearance, with lively songs, gestures, and movements. The immediate cause of this species of drama was derived from the festivals of *Bacchus*, where satyr-masks were a common disguise. In mythological stories, with which *Bacchus* had no concern, these constant attendants of his were, no doubt, in some sort arbitrarily introduced, but still not without a degree of propriety. As nature, in her original freedom, appeared rich in wonderful productions to the fancy of the Greeks, they could with propriety people the wild landscapes, far from polished cities, where the scene was usually laid, with that sensual and gay sylvan creation. The composition of demi-gods and demi-beasts, formed an amusing contrast. We have an example in the *Cyclops* of the manner in which the poets proceeded in such subjects. It is not without amusement, though the real substance of it is nearly all contained in the *Odyssey*; only the pranks of *Silenus* and his band appear a little coarse now and then. We must confess that the greatest merit of this piece, in our eyes, is its rarity, as it is the only remaining thing of its kind which we possess. In these satirical

dramas, *Æschylus* must without doubt have displayed more boldness and meaning in his mirth; as for instance, when he made *Prometheus* bring down his heavenly fire to the rude and stupid race of mortals; and *Sophocles*, as we may conjecture from the few samples we have, must have been more elegant and moral, when he introduced the goddesses contending for the prize of beauty, or *Nausicaa*, when she offered her protection to the shipwrecked *Ulysses*. It is a striking feature of the light way of living of the Greeks, of the hilarity of disposition, so foreign to every thing like stately dignity, which led them to admire whatever was suitable and agreeable in art, even in things of the least importance, that in this drama called *Nausicaa*, or the *Washers*, where according to *Homer* the princess at the end of the washing recreates herself with her maids in playing at ball, *Sophocles* himself appeared playing at ball, and by his grace in this bodily exercise acquired much applause. The great poet, the respected Athenian citizen, the man who had already perhaps been a general, appeared publicly in female clothing, and as, on account of the feebleness of his voice, he could not play the principal part of *Nausicaa*, he acted perhaps the mute under part of a maid, for the sake of giving the slight ornament of bodily activity to the representation of his piece.

The history of ancient tragedy ends with *Euripides*, although there were a number of still later tragedians; *Agathon* for instance, whom *Aristopha-*

nes describes as breathing ointment, and crowned with flowers, and who is represented by Plato in his *Symposion*, a discourse in the taste of the sophist Gorgias, as abounding in the most exquisite ornaments, and the most dazzling antitheses. He commenced with mythology, as the natural materials of tragedy, and occasionally wrote pieces with fictitious names, (a transition towards the new comedy) one of which was called the *Flower*, and was probably therefore neither seriously affecting nor terrible, but in the style of the idyl.

The Alexandrian literati also occupied themselves with composing tragedies; but were we to judge of them from the only piece which has come down to us, the *Alexandra* of *Lycophron*, which consists of an endless prophetic monologue, overladen with an obscure mythology, these productions of subtlety and artifice must have been extremely inanimate, and untheatrical, and altogether destitute of interest. The creative powers of the Greeks were so completely exhausted, that they were under the necessity of repeating the works of their ancient masters.

LECTURE VI.

The old comedy proved to be completely a contrast to tragedy.—Parody.—Ideality of comedy the reverse of that of tragedy.—Mirthful caprice.—Allegoric and political signification.—The chorus and its parabases.—Aristophanes.—His character as an artist.—Description and character of his remaining works.—A scene translated from the *Acharnæ* by way of Appendix.

WE now leave tragic poetry for the consideration of a species of an entirely opposite description, *the old comedy*. Striking as this diversity is, we shall however commence with pointing out a certain symmetry of contrast between them, which may have a tendency to exhibit the essential character of both in a clearer light. In forming a judgment of the old comedy, we must banish every idea of what is called comedy by the moderns, and what went by the same name among the Greeks themselves at an after period. These two species of comedy differ from each other, not only in accidental peculiarities (such as the introduction of real names and characters in the old), but in the most essential characteristics. We must also guard ourselves against considering the old comedy as the rude commencement of a branch of the drama, which was afterwards carried

to a higher degree of perfection,* an idea which many, from the unbridled licentiousness of the old comic writers, have allowed themselves to entertain. The first however is much more entitled to the appellation of the genuine poetical species; and the new comedy, as I shall show in the sequel, is a falling off into prose and reality.

We shall form the best idea of the old comedy, in considering it as the complete contrast to tragedy. This was probably the meaning of the assertion of Socrates, which is mentioned by Plato towards the end of his Symposium. He tells us that, after the other guests had dispersed or fallen asleep, Socrates continued awake with Aristophanes and Agathon, and that while he drank with them out of a large cup, he forced them to confess, though unwillingly, that it was the business of one man to be equally master of tragic and comic composition, and that the tragic poet, in virtue of his art, was also a comic poet. This was not only repugnant to the general opinion, which wholly separated the two kinds of talent, but also to experience, as no tragic poet had ever

* This is the sense in which the section of Barthelemy, in *Anacharsis*, on the old comedy is composed: one of the poorest and most erroneous parts of his work. With the pitiful arrogance of ignorance, Voltaire pronounced a sweeping condemnation of Aristophanes, (in his *Philosophical Dictionary*, under the article *Athée*) and the modern French critics have for the most part followed his example. We may however find the foundation of all the erroneous opinions of the moderns on this subject, and the same prosaical mode of viewing it, in the comparison between Aristophanes and Menander, in Plutarch,

attempted to distinguish himself in the comic department, or *vice versa*; and the reason of this is evident from their essential characters. The Platonic Socrates says, at another time, on the subject of comic imitation: we can only become acquainted with things of opposite characters through each other, and consequently we can only know what is laughable and ludicrous by knowing also what is serious. If the divine Plato had been pleased to communicate his own thoughts, or those of his master, respecting the manner of carrying the sentiments of their dialogue into execution, we should undoubtedly have been relieved from the necessity of the following investigation.

One view of the relation of comic to tragic poetry may be comprehended under the idea of parody. This parody however was infinitely more powerful than that of the comic epopée, as the subject parodied was brought much more vividly before the mind by means of scenic representation; than the epopée, in which the transactions of a distant age were related as already past. The subject of the comic parody was a recent action, and as the representation took place on the same stage where the spectators were accustomed to see its grave model, this must have contributed very much to heighten the effect. It happened also that not merely single scenes, but the very form of tragic composition was parodied, and the parody not only extended to the poetry, but also to the music and dancing, to the acting, and the scenic decorations. Nay,

even when the drama trod in the footsteps of the plastic arts, it was still the subject of comic parody, as the ideal figures of deities were evidently transformed into caricatures.* The more the productions of all these arts came within the operation of the external senses, the more the Greeks, in popular festivals, religious ceremonies, and solemn processions, were accustomed to, and familiar with, the noble style which was the native element of tragic representation, so much the more irresistibly ludicrous must have been the effect of the general parody of the arts, which it was the object of comedy to exhibit.

But this idea does not exhaust the essential character of comedy : for parody always supposes a reference to the subject which is parodied, and a necessary dependence on it. The old comedy however is a species of poetry as independent and original as tragedy itself ; it stands upon an equal elevation, that is, it extends as far beyond the limits of reality into the regions of a creative fancy.

Tragedy is the most serious description of poetry, and comedy altogether sportive. Seriousness consists, as I have already observed in the introduction, in the direction of the mental powers to an object, and the limitation of their activity to that object. The opposite quality therefore consists in the apparent want of aim, and freedom from all restraint in the exercise of the mental powers ; and

* As an example of this, I may allude to the well known vase-figures, where Mercury and Jupiter are represented as comic-masks, meditating the descent by a ladder to Alcmena.

it is therefore the more perfect, the greater the scale on which these powers are exhibited, and the more vivid the appearance of this want of aim, and of the prevalence of whim and caprice. Wit and raillery may be employed in a sportive manner, but they are also both of them compatible with the most austere earnestness, as is proved by the example of the later Roman satires, and the ancient Iambic poetry of the Greeks, where these means are made subservient to the expression of hatred and discontent.

The new comedy, it is true, represents what is laughable in character, and in the contrast of situations and combinations; and it is the more comic the more it is distinguished by a want of aim: misconceptions, erroneous notions, the fruitless efforts of ludicrous passion, especially if the whole at last terminates in nothing; but still with all this mirth, the form of the representation itself is serious, and regularly connected with a certain aim. In the old comedy the form was sportive, and was characterized by an apparent whim and caprice; the whole production was one entire jest on a large scale, which again contained a world of separate jests within itself, and each occupied its own place, without appearing to have any concern with the rest. In tragedy, if I may be allowed to explain my meaning by a simile, the monarchical constitution prevails, but a monarchy without despotism, as in the heroic times of the Greeks: every thing yields a willing obedience to the dignity of the heroic sceptre. Comedy again

is a more democratic species of poetry, and is more inclined even to the confusion of anarchy, than to any circumscription of general liberty, in the exercise of the mental powers, and even in separate thoughts, sallies, and allusions.

Whatever is dignified, noble, and grand in human nature, will only admit of a serious representation; for the person representing feels himself opposed by the subject in the exact ratio of its elevation, and is consequently tied down by it. The comic poet must therefore divest his characters of all qualities of this description; he must even deny the existence of such qualities altogether, and form an ideal of human nature in an opposite sense to that of the tragedians, namely, in one that is odious and base. But as the tragic ideal is not a collective model of all possible virtues, neither does this inverted ideality consist in an aggregation of moral enormities and marks of degeneracy, beyond what is to be found in real life, but rather in a dependence on the animal part of our being, in the want of freedom and independence, in the want of coherence, and in the contradictions of the inward man, from which all our follies and infatuations have their origin.

The serious ideal consists of the unity and harmonious blending of the sensual man in the mental, which we see most clearly exemplified in the plastic arts, where the form, when in a complete state, is merely a symbol of mental perfection, and of the most elevated moral ideas, and where the body is wholly imbued by the soul, which is every where

visible.* The merry or ludicrous ideal, on the other hand, consists in the perfect harmony and concord of the higher part of our nature, with the animal part as the prevailing principle. Reason and intellect are represented as voluntary slaves of the senses.

Hence we shall find that that which in Aristophanes has given so much offence, flows necessarily from the very principle of comedy: the frequent allusion to the lower necessities of the body, the wanton pictures of animal desire, which, in spite of all the restraints imposed on it by morality and decency, is always breaking loose without the consciousness of the individual. If we reflect attentively, we shall find that even yet on our own stages, the infallible and inexhaustible source of the ludicrous is derived from the same ungovernable impulses of sensuality at variance with higher duties: cowardice, childish vanity, loquacity, gulosity, laziness, &c. Hence in the caducity of age, libidinous desires are more laughable than at an earlier period, as we see that they do not arise from mere animal impulse, but that reason has only served to extend the dominion of the senses beyond their proper limits. In drunkenness, too, indivi-

* I am afraid that this may be considered somewhat too mystical by many English readers. I subjoin the original, as I cannot translate the passage to my own satisfaction: *Wie wir es auf das klarste in der Plastik erkennen, wo die vollendung der Gestalt nur Sinnbild geistiger vollkommenheit und der höchsten sittlichen Ideen wird, wo der Körper ganz vom Geist durchdrungen und bis zur verklärung vergeistigt ist.*—TRANS.

duals in some degree place themselves in the condition of the comic ideal.

We must not allow ourselves to entertain the erroneous idea, that the old comic writers gave the names of existing persons to their characters, and exhibited them on the stage with all the circumstances peculiar to certain individuals. For such historical characters have always with them an allegorical signification, and represent a class; and as their features were overcharged in the masks, their characters were overcharged in like manner in the representation. But still this constant allusion to the nearest reality, which not only allowed the poet, in the character of the chorus, to converse with the public in a general way, but also to point at certain individual spectators, is of essential importance in any view of this species of poetry.—As tragedy delights in harmonious unity, comedy flourishes in a chaotic exuberance: it seeks out the most glaring and diversified objects, and the most strongly marked oppositions. It works up therefore the most singular unheard of, and even impossible, adventures, with the local and peculiar circumstances which are nearest at hand.

The comic poet, as well as the tragic, transports his characters to an ideal element; not however to a world subjected to necessity, but one where the caprice of an inventive wit prevails without restraint, and where all the laws of reality are suspended. He is at liberty therefore to invent an action as sprightly and fantastic as possible; it may even be unconnected and contradictory, if it

be calculated to place a circle of comic incidents and characters in the clearest light. In this last respect, the work should, nay must, have a leading aim, or it will otherwise be defective in solidity; and in this view also the comedies of Aristophanes may be considered as perfectly systematical. But then, that the comic inspiration may not be lost, this aim must be made a matter of diversion, and be concealed in a multitude of foreign intermixtures of all descriptions. Comedy at its commencement, namely, in the hands of its Doric founder, Epicharmus, borrowed its materials chiefly from the mythical world. Even in its maturity it appears not to have renounced this choice altogether, as we may see from many of the titles of the lost pieces of Aristophanes and his contemporaries; and at a later period, in the interval between the old and new comedy, for particular reasons, it returned again to mythology, with a peculiar degree of predilection. But as the contrast between the materials and the form is here in its proper place, and nothing can be more directly opposed to the exhibition of the ludicrous, than the most important and serious concerns of men, the peculiar subject of the old comedy was naturally therefore taken from public life and the state. It is altogether political, and the private and family life, beyond which the new never soars, was only introduced occasionally and indirectly, with a reference to the public. The chorus is therefore essential to it, as being in some sort a representation of the public: it must by no means be con-

sidered as something accidental, which we may account for in the local origin of old comedy; we may assign as a more substantial reason, that it belongs to the complete parody of the tragic form. It contributes also to the expression of that festal gladness of which comedy was the most unrestrained effusion. For in all the popular and religious festivals of the Greeks, choral songs, accompanied by dancing, were exhibited. The comic chorus transforms itself occasionally into such an expression of the public joy, as for instance, when the women who celebrate the Thesmophoriæ in the piece that bears that name, in the midst of the most amusing drolleries, begin to chaunt their melodious hymn in honour of the gods of the festival, in the same manner as took place on a real occasion. At these times we observe such a display of sublime lyric poetry, that the passages may be transplanted into tragedy without any change or modification. There is one deviation however from the tragic model, as it frequently happens that there are several choruses in the same comedy, who at one time all sing together, and in opposite positions, and at other times change with, and succeed each other, without any general reference. The most remarkable peculiarity however of the comic chorus is the parabasis, an address to the spectators by the chorus, in the name and under the authority of the poet, which has no concern with the subject of the piece. Sometimes he enlarges on his own merits, and ridicules the pretensions of his rivals; at other times he avails himself of his rights

as an Athenian citizen to deliver, in every assembly of the people, proposals of a serious or ludicrous nature for the public good. The parabasis may, strictly speaking, be considered as repugnant to the essence of dramatic representation: for in the drama the poet should always disappear behind the characters; and these characters ought to discourse and act as if they were alone, and without any perceptible reference to the spectators. All tragical impressions are therefore by such intermixtures infallibly destroyed; but these intentional interruptions or intermezzos, though even more serious in themselves than the subject of the representation, are hailed with welcome in the comic tone, as we are then unwilling to submit to the constraint of an employment of the mind, which by continuance assumes the appearance of labour. The parabasis may partly have owed its invention to the circumstance of the comic poets not having such ample materials as the tragic, to fill up the intervals of the action when the stage was empty, by affecting and inspired poetry. But it is consistent with the essence of the old comedy, where not merely the subject, but the whole action, was sportive and jocular. The unlimited dominion of fun* is evident even in this, that the dramatic form itself is not seriously adhered to, and that its laws are often suspended; as in a droll disguise we

* This word is not in the best repute, for what reason the translator is not aware; but as it is expressive, and corresponds with the original, *scherz*, he has not hesitated to use it. — FRANS.

sometimes venture to lay aside the mask. The practice of throwing out allusions and hints to the pit is even retained in the comedy of the present day, and is often found to be attended with great success, although unconditionally reprobated by many critics. I shall afterwards examine how far, and in what departments of comedy, these allusions are admissible.

To sum up in a few words the aim and object of tragedy and comedy, we may observe, that as tragedy elevates us by painful feelings to the most dignified view of humanity, in the words of Plato—"the imitation of the most beautiful and exemplary life;" comedy, on the other hand, from a derisory and degrading way of viewing all things, converts them into a source of the most petulant hilarity.

We have now but one comic writer of the old kind, and we cannot therefore, in forming an opinion of his merits, derive any assistance from a comparison with other masters. Aristophanes had many predecessors, Magnes, Cratinus, Crates, and others; he was indeed one of the latest comic authors, as he survived even the old comedy itself. We have no reason however to believe that we witness its decline in him, as in the case of the last tragedians; for in all probability the old comedy was still rising in merit, and he himself one of its most perfect poets. It was very different with the old comedy and with tragedy; the latter died a natural, and the former a violent death. Tragedy ceased to exist, because that species of poetry

seemed to be exhausted, because it was abandoned, and because no person could again rise to the same elevation. Comedy was deprived by the hand of power of that unrestrained freedom which was necessary to its existence. Horace, in a few words, informs us of this catastrophe. "To these (Thespis and Æschylus) followed the old comedy, not without great praise; but its freedom degenerated into licentiousness, and into a violence which deservedly called for the interposition of the law. The law was enacted, and the chorus preserved an unworthy silence, after it was deprived of the power to injure."* Towards the end of the Peloponnesian war, when a few individuals, contrary to the constitution, had assumed the supreme authority in Athens, a law was enacted, empowering every person attacked by comic poets, to bring them to justice; and a prohibition was issued against the introduction of real persons on the stage, or the use of such masks as bore a resemblance to their features, &c. This gave rise to what is called the middle comedy. The same form was still continued; and the representation, though not allegorical, remained always a parody. But the essence existed no more, and this species must have become insipid when no longer seasoned by the salt of personal ridicule. Its whole attraction consisted in idealising jocularly the nearest reality, that is, in representing it under the light of

* Successit vetus his comedia, non sine multâ
Laude, sed in vitium libertas excidit, et vim
Dignam legē regi: lex est accepta: chorusque
Turpiter obicit, sublato jure nocendi.

the most preposterous perversity ; and how was it possible to lash even the general errors of the state, without giving displeasure to individuals. I cannot therefore agree with Horace in the opinion that its abuse gave rise to this restriction. The old comedy flourished during the existence of the Athenian liberty ; and both were oppressed under the same circumstances, and by the same persons. So far from the calumnies of Aristophanes having been the occasion of the death of Socrates, as many persons, without a knowledge of history, have thought proper to assert (for the *Clouds* were composed a great number of years before), it was under the same violent usurpation of power that the sportive censure of Aristophanes was reduced to silence, and the graver animadversions of the incorruptible Socrates were punished with death. We do not see that the persecution of Aristophanes was productive of any detriment to Euripides ; the people of Athens beheld with admiration the tragedies of the one, and their parody by the other, represented on the same stage ; every variety of talent was allowed to flourish undisturbed in the enjoyment of equal rights. Never was there sovereign, for such was the Athenian people, who could with better humour bear the most unwelcome truths, and even to be openly laughed at. If the abuses in the administration of the state were not by these means corrected, still it was a grand point that this unreserved exposure should be even tolerated. Besides, Aristophanes always shows himself a zealous patriot ; he attacks the powerful deceivers of the

people, those whom the grave Thucydides describes as so pestilential; he counselled peace in the civil-war, which for ever destroyed the prosperity of Greece; he every where recommends the simplicity and austerity of ancient manners. So much for the political import of the old comedy.

But I hear it said, Aristophanes was an immoral buffoon. Yes, among other things, he was that also; and we are by no means disposed to justify the man, who with such great talents, could allow himself to sink so very low, whether from the impulse of rude inclinations, or from an idea of the necessity of gaining over the people, that he might tell them bold and unpleasant truths. We know at least that he boasts of having been much more sparing than his rivals in the use of obscene jests to gain the laughter of the mob, and of having in this carried his art to perfection. That we may not be unjust towards him, we must consider what appears in him so repulsive to us, not according to modern ideas, but in the point of view of the then state of the world. In many respects the ethics of the ancients were altogether different from ours, and of a much freer character. This arose from the very nature of their religion, which was a true natural worship, and had sanctioned many public customs grossly injurious to decency. Besides from the very retired manner in which the women lived,*

* This brings us to the consideration of the question so much agitated by antiquaries, whether the Grecian women were present at the representation of plays, and more especially of comedies. I consider myself entitled to affirm that in tragedies

while the men were almost constantly together, the language of conversation possessed a certain rudeness, as is always the case under similar circumstances. In modern Europe, since the origin

they were present, as the story of the Eumenides in *Æschylus* could not have been invented with any degree of propriety, had women never visited the theatre; and as there is a passage in *Plato*, (*De Leg. lib. ii. p. 658. D.*) in which he mentions the predilection of cultivated females for tragical composition.—Moreover *Julius Pollux*, among the technical expressions relative to the theatre, mentions the Greek word for spectatress. But in the case of the old comedy, I should be inclined to think that they were not present. However, its indecency alone does not appear to be a decisive proof. Even in the religious festivals the eyes of the women must have been exposed to many sights of great indecency. But in the numerous addresses in *Aristophanes* to the spectators, even where he distinguishes them according to their respective ages and otherwise, we never observe any mention of spectatresses, and the poet would hardly have omitted the opportunity which this afforded him for some witticism or joke. The only passage with which I am acquainted, whence any conclusion may be drawn in favour of the presence of women, is *Pax*, v. 963—967. But still it remains doubtful, and I recommend it to the consideration of the critic.—AUTHOR.

There is an express mention of women in the passage here alluded to :

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ.

——τῶν θεωμενων

οὐκ ἔστιν αὐδαίς, ὅστις οὐ κήρην ἔχει

ΤΡΥΓΑΙΟΣ.

οὐχ αἱ γυναῖκες ἔλαβον;

but then their presence might possibly be feigned to give a handle for the coarse joke which follows,

——ἀλλ' ἐκ ἐντροπίας

ἀφέναν αὐταῖς ἄνδρες.

TRANS.

of chivalry, women have given the tone of social life, and to the respectful homage which we yield to them, we owe the prevalence of a nobler morality in conversation, in the fine arts, and in poetry. Besides, the ancient comic writers, who took the world as they found it, had before their eyes a very great degree of corruption of morals.

The most honourable testimony in favour of Aristophanes, is that of the sage Plato, who, in an epigram, says that the Graces would have selected his mind for their residence, who constantly read him, and who transmitted the *Clouds* to Dionysius the elder, with the remark, that from this play (in which, with the trade of the sophists, philosophy itself, and even his master Socrates, were attacked,) he would be able to become acquainted with the state of Athens. He could hardly mean merely that the play might be considered a proof of the unbridled democratic freedom which prevailed in Athens, but must have intended to acknowledge the profound knowledge of the world possessed by the poet, and his insight into the whole machinery of the civil constitution. Plato has also characterized him in an admirable manner in his *Symposion*, where he puts into his mouth a speech on love, which Aristophanes, far from every thing like high enthusiasm, considers merely in a sensual view. His description of it is however equally original and ingenious.

We might apply to the pieces of Aristophanes the motto of a pleasant and acute adventurer in Goethe: "Mad but wise." Here we are best en-

abled to conceive why the dramatic art was consecrated to Bacchus: it is the drunkenness of poetry, the Bacchanalia of fun. This faculty will at times assert its rights as well as others; and hence several nations have set apart certain festivals, such as Saturnalia, Carnivals, &c. in which the people may give themselves altogether up to frolicsome follies, that when once the fit is over, they may remain quiet, and apply themselves to serious concerns during the rest of the year. The old comedy is a general masking of the world, during which many things happen that are not authorised by the ordinary rules of propriety, but during which also many things that are diverting, witty, and even instructive, come out, which without this momentary suspension of order would never be heard of.

However vulgar and even corrupted Aristophanes may have been in his personal inclinations, and however much some of his jokes may have violated the laws of morality and taste, we cannot deny to him, both in the general plan and execution of his poems, the praise of care, and the masterly hand of a finished artist. His language is extremely elegant, it displays the purest Atticism, and he accommodates it with the greatest dexterity to every tone, from the most familiar dialogue up to the high elevation of the dithyrambic ode. We cannot doubt that he would have been equally successful in grave poetry, when we see the wanton luxuriance with which he sometimes lavishes it, for the purpose of immediately destroying the impression. The elegant choice of the language

which he generally uses is the more attractive from the contrast occasionally displayed by him ; for he not only indulges at times in the rudest expressions of the people, in foreign dialects, and even in the mutilated articulation of the Greek in the mouths of barbarians, but he extends the same arbitrary power, which he exercised over nature and human affairs, to language itself, and by composition, allusion to names of persons, or imitation of particular sounds, produces words of the most singular description. The structure of his versification is not less artificial than that of the tragedians ; he uses the same forms, but differently modified : his object is ease and variety instead of gravity and dignity ; but amidst all this apparent irregularity he still adheres with great accuracy to the laws of metrical composition. As Aristophanes appears to me to have displayed, in the exercise of his separate but infinitely varied art, the richest developement of almost every poetical property, whenever I read his works, I am equally astonished at the extraordinary qualifications which they suppose his spectators to have possessed. We might expect, from the citizens of a popular government, an intimate acquaintance with the history and constitution of their country, with public events and transactions, with the peculiarities of all their contemporaries of any note or consequence. But Aristophanes supposes his audience to have also possessed an extensive acquaintance with the mechanism of poetry, they must have had almost every word of the tragical master-pieces by heart, to

to understand his parodies. And what a quick presence of mind they must have had to catch in such a rapid flight, the lightest and most complicated irony, the most unexpected sallies, and unusual allusions, which are frequently denoted by the mere inflection of a syllable! We may boldly affirm, that notwithstanding all the explanations which have come down to us, notwithstanding the accumulation of learning which has been displayed, the half of the wit of Aristophanes is altogether lost to the moderns. These comedies which, amidst all their farcical peculiarities, display the most extensive knowledge of human life, could only as a source of popular amusement be properly understood and appreciated by the incredible acuteness and vivacity of the Attic intellect. We may envy the poet who could reckon on so clever and accomplished a public; but this was in truth a very dangerous advantage. Spectators, whose understandings were so quick, would not be easily pleased. Aristophanes complains of the excessive fastidiousness of the taste of the Athenians, with whom the most admired of his predecessors were immediately out of favour, when the smallest trace of a falling off in their mental powers was perceivable. But again, he allows that the other Greeks bore not the slightest comparison to them in a knowledge of the dramatic art. All the talents of Athens strove to excel in this department, and the competition was limited to the short period of a few festivals, during which the people always expected a succession of novelties. The distribution of the prizes (on which all depended, there

being no other remaining notification of the public opinion) was determined by a single representation. We may easily imagine the state of perfection which this representation would attain under the directing care of the poet. If we also take into consideration the high state of the tributary arts, the utmost distinctness of delivery of the most finished poetry, both in speaking and singing, with the magnificence and great extent of the theatre, we shall then have some idea of a theatrical enjoyment, which has never, in an equal degree, been since known in the world.

Although, among the remaining works of Aristophanes, we have several of his earliest pieces, they all bear the same stamp of maturity. But he had long laboured, in silence, to perfect himself in the exercise of an art which he conceived to be of all others the most difficult; nay, from diffidence (in his own words, like a young maiden who consigns to the care of others the child of her secret love), he even gave out his earliest pieces under concealed names. He appeared for the first time without this disguise in the *Horsemen*, and here he displayed the most undaunted resolution in openly attacking the popular opinion. His object was nothing less than the overthrow of Cleon, who after the death of Pericles was at the head of all state affairs, and who was a promoter of war, and a worthless and vulgar man, but at the same time the idol of an infatuated people. The only opponents of Cleon were the rich proprietors who constituted the class of horsemen or Knights: they were interwoven by Aris-

tophanes in the strongest manner in his party, as they formed the chorus. He had used the precaution of never naming Cleon, though he portrayed him in such a way that it was impossible to mistake him. Yet such was the dread entertained of the party of Cleon, that no mask-maker would venture to execute his likeness: the poet therefore embraced the resolution of acting the part himself, with his face merely painted over. We may easily imagine the storms and tumults which this representation must have excited among the assembled crowd; the bold and well concerted efforts of the poet were however crowned with a successful result: his piece obtained the prize. He was proud of this theatrical heroism, and often alludes with a feeling of satisfaction to the Herculean valour with which he first combated the mighty monster. It is not easily possible for a play to be more historical and political; and its rhetorical power in exciting our displeasure against Cleon is almost irresistible: it is a true dramatic Philippic. It does not however appear to me the most fortunate in point of amusement and invention. The thought of the serious danger which he was incurring may possibly have disposed him to a more serious tone than was suitable to comedy, or he may have been stimulated by the persecution already suffered from Cleon to vent his rage against him in too Archilochean a manner. When the storm of cutting invective is somewhat over, we have then several droll scenes, such as that where the two demagogues, the leather-dealer (that is, Cleon); and the

sausage-seller, vie with each other by all manner of predictions and dainties to gain the favour of Demos, a personification of the people, who has become childish through age, a scene humorous in the highest degree; and the piece ends with a triumphal rejoicing, which may almost be said to be affecting, when the scene changes from the Pnyx, the place where the people assembled, to the majestic Propylæon, and when Demos, whose youth has been renewed in a wonderful manner, comes forward in the garb of an ancient Athenian, and shows that with early strength he has also recovered the sentiments of the age of the battle of Marathon.

With the exception of this attack on Cleon, and with the exception also of the attacks on Euripides, whom he seems to have pursued with the most unrelenting perseverance, the other pieces of Aristophanes are not so exclusively pointed against individuals. They have always a general, and for the most part a very important aim, which the poet, with all his turnings, extravagance, and foreign intermixtures, never loses from his sight. The plays of *Peace*, *Acharnæ*, and *Lysistrata*, will be found to recommend peace; and one object of *the women in the assembly of the people, of the women at the festival of the Thesmophoriæ, and of Lysistrata*, is to throw ridicule on the relations and the morals of the female sex. In the *Clouds* he laughs at the metaphysics of the sophists, in the *Wasps* at the rage of the Athenians for hearing and determining law-suits; the subject of the *Frogs* is

the decline of the tragic art, and *Plutus* is an allegory on the unjust distribution of wealth. The *Birds* are, of all his pieces, the one of which the aim is the least apparent, and it is on that very account one of the most diverting.

Peace begins in the most spirited and lively manner; the tranquilly-disposed Trygæus rides on a dunghill-beetle to heaven in the manner of Bellerophon; War, a desolating giant, with Tumult his companion, in place of all the other gods, inhabits Olympus, and pounds the cities in a great mortar, making use of the celebrated generals as pestles; Peace lies bound in a deep well, and is dragged up by a rope, through the united efforts of all the Grecian states: all these ingenious and fanciful inventions are calculated to produce the most ludicrous effect. The play is not however afterwards sustained at an equal elevation; nothing remains but to sacrifice, and to carouse in honour of the recovered Goddess of Peace, when the importunate visits of such persons as found their advantage in war furnish an elegant entertainment, but one which by no means corresponds to the expectations to which the commencement gives rise. We have here an additional example to prove that the ancient comic writers not only changed the decoration during the intervals, when the stage was empty, but also while an actor was in sight. The scene changes from Attica to Olympus, while Trygæus is suspended in the air on his beetle, and calls anxiously to the director of the machinery to take care that he does not break his neck. His descent

into the orchestra afterwards denotes his return to the earth. It is possible to overlook the freedom taken by the tragedians with the unity of place and time, on which such ridiculous stress has been laid by many of the moderns, but the bold manner in which the old comic writer subjects these external circumstances to his sportive caprice is so striking, that it must force itself on the attention of the most short-sighted individual: and yet in all the treatises on the constitution of the Greek stage, due respect has never yet been paid to it.

The *Acharnæ*, an earlier piece,* appears to me to possess a much higher degree of excellence than *Peace*, on account of the continual progress of the story, and the increasing drollery, which at last ends in downright Bacchanalian revelry. Dikaiopolis, the honest citizen, enraged at the base artifices by which the people are deceived, and by which they are induced to reject all proposals for peace, sends an embassy to Lacedæmon, and concludes a treaty for himself and his family. He then retires to the country, and in spite of every obstacle, sets apart a piece of ground before his house, where there is a peaceful market for the people of the neighbouring states, while the rest of the country is suffering from the calamities of war. The blessings of peace are represented in the most tempting manner for

* The *Didascalizæ* give it a place in the year immediately preceding the appearance of the *Horsemen*. It is therefore the first of the remaining pieces of Aristophanes, and the only one of those which he gave out under a concealed name, that has come down to us.

hungry stomachs: the fat Bœotian brings his delicious eels and poultry for sale, and nothing is thought of but feasting and carousing. Lamachus, the celebrated general, who lives on the other side, is, in consequence of a sudden eruption of the enemies, called on to defend the frontiers; Dikaiopolis on the other hand is invited by his neighbours to a feast, where every one brings his own drink. The preparations for war, and the preparations in the kitchen, are now carried on with equal industry and alacrity: here the lance is laid hold of, and there the spit; the harness lies in one corner, and the wine-flaggon in another; some are fixing feathers to their helmets, and others are plucking thrushes. Shortly afterwards Lamachus returns, supported by two of his companions in arms, with a broken head and a lame foot, and from the other side we see Dikaiopolis carried in drunk, by two good-natured maidens. The lamentations of the one are perpetually mimicked and ridiculed in the rejoicings of the other; and with this contrast, which is carried to the very utmost extent, the piece is brought to a conclusion.

Lysistrata is in such bad repute, that we dare only mention it in a cursory manner, as we are treading on burning ashes. According to the story of the poet, the women have taken it into their heads, by means of a rigid determination, to compel their husbands to make peace. Under the guidance of a shrewd leader they organise a conspiracy for this purpose throughout all Greece, and at the same time gain possession of the port of

Acropolis in Athens. The hard situation to which the men are reduced by this separation gives rise to the most laughable scenes; plenipotentiaries appear from the two hostile powers, and peace is speedily concluded under the management of the sage Lysistrata. Notwithstanding the mad indecencies which are contained in the piece, its aim, when stript of them, is upon the whole extremely innocent: the longing for the enjoyment of domestic joys, so often interrupted by the absence of the husbands, is made the means of putting an end to the calamitous war by which Greece had so long been torn in pieces. The honest bluntness of the Lacedemonians is here portrayed in a most inimitable manner.

The *Ecclesiazusæ* is in like manner a female government, but a much more depraved one than the former. The women steal, in the dress of men, into the assemblies of the people, and by means of the majority of voices which they have obtained in this clandestine manner, they decree a new constitution, in which there is to be a community of goods and of women. This is a satire on the ideal republics of the philosophers, with such laws as Protagoras before Plato had framed. The comedy appears to me to labour under the very same fault with *Peace*: the introduction, the secret assembly of the women, their rehearsal of their parts as men, the counting of the popular assembly, are all handled in the most masterly manner; but towards the middle the action stands still. Nothing remains but the representation of the perplexities and

confusion which arise from the various communities, especially the community of women, and from the prescribed equality of rights in the love of the old and the ugly, as well as of the young and the beautiful. These perplexities are pleasant enough, but they turn too much on a repetition of the same joke. Generally speaking, the old allegorical comedy is exposed to the danger of sinking in its progress. When we begin with turning the world upside down, the most wonderful incidents follow one another as a matter of course, but they are apt to appear petty and insignificant, when compared with the decisive traits of a frolicsome nature, which are first exhibited.

The *Thesmophoriazusæ* has a proper intrigue, a knot which is first loosed at the conclusion, and possesses therefore a great advantage over the rest. Euripides, on account of the well known hatred of women displayed in his tragedies, was to be accused and condemned at the festival of the Thesmophoriæ, where women only were admissible. After a fruitless attempt to induce the effeminate poet Agathon to undertake the hazardous experiment, Euripides prevails on his aged father-in-law, Mnesilochus, to disguise himself as a woman, that under this assumed appearance he may plead his cause. The manner in which he does this gives rise to suspicions, and he is discovered to be a man; he flies to the altar for refuge, and to secure himself still more from the impending danger, he snatches a child from the arms of one of the women, and threatens to kill it if they do not cease to per-

secute him. When he attempts to strangle it, it turns out to be a leather wine-flask wrapped up like a child. Euripides now appears in a number of different shapes to save his friend: at one time he is Menelaus, who finds Helen again in Egypt; at another time he is Echo, who assists the fettered Andromeda to pour out her lamentations, and immediately afterwards he appears as Perseus, who wishes to relieve her from her rock. He at length accomplishes the freedom of Mnesilochus from the sort of pillory in which he was confined, by assuming the character of a procuress, and enticing away the officer of justice who guards him, a simple barbarian, by the charms of a female flute player. These parodied scenes, composed almost entirely in the very words of the tragedies, are inimitable. We may always, generally speaking, lay our account with the most ingenious and apposite ridicule, whenever Euripides happens to be introduced; it seems as if the mind of Aristophanes had possessed a peculiar and specific power of giving a comic turn to the poetry of this tragedian.

The *Clouds* is well known, but has not however for the most part been either sufficiently understood or appreciated. The object of the piece is to show, that by a fondness for philosophical subtleties the warlike exercises come to be neglected, that speculation only serves to shake the foundations of religion and morals, and that by the arts of sophistry, every right is rendered questionable, and the worst cause is frequently victorious. The *Clouds* themselves, as the chorus of the piece (for

the poet converts these substances into persons, and dresses them out in a singular enough manner), are an allegory on the metaphysical speculations which do not rest on the ground of experience, but float about, without any definite shape or body, in the kingdom of possibilities. We may observe in general that it is one of the peculiarities of the mirth of Aristophanes to adopt a metaphor literally, and to exhibit it in this way before the eyes of the spectators. It is said of a man addicted to unintelligible reveries, that he is up in the clouds, and accordingly Socrates is actually let down in a basket at his first appearance. Whether this applies exactly to him is another question; but we have reason to believe that the philosophy of Socrates was of a very ideal cast, and that it was by no means so limited to popular application, as Xenophon would have us to believe. But why has Aristophanes given us a personification of the sophistical metaphysics in the venerable Socrates, who was himself a determined opponent of the Sophists? There was probably some personal grudge at the bottom of this, and we must not attempt to justify it; but the choice of the name by no means diminishes the merit of the picture itself. Aristophanes declares this play the most elaborate of all his works: but in his opinions we are not always to take him exactly at his word. He lavishes upon himself on all occasions, and without the least hesitation, the most extravagant praises; and this was considered to constitute a part of the freedoms which comedy was allowed to take. But

the *Clouds* was treated with great severity at its representation, and twice contended in vain for the prize.

The *Frogs*, as we have already said, is a piece of which the subject is the decline of the tragic art. Euripides was dead, as well as Sophocles and Agathon, and none but poets of the second rank were then remaining. Bacchus feels the want of Euripides, and resolves on bringing him back from the world below. In this he imitates Hercules, but although he is furnished with his lion-skin and club, he is very unlike him in his sentiments, and affords us, by his pusillanimity, much matter for laughter. Here we have a characteristic specimen of the audacity of Aristophanes: he does not even spare the patron of his own art, in whose honour the drama was exhibited. It was thought that the gods understood a joke as well, if not better, than men. Bacchus rows over the Acherusian lake, where the frogs greet him with their melodious croakings. The proper chorus however consists of the shades of those initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries, and odes of astonishing beauty are put in their mouths. Æschylus had at first seated himself on the tragic throne in the world below, but Euripides was now desirous of ejecting him from it. Pluto presides, and appoints Bacchus to determine this great controversy; the two poets, the sublime and enraged Æschylus, and the subtle and vain Euripides, take opposite positions and deliver specimens of their poetical powers; they sing and speak to each other, and in all their features are

characterised in the most masterly manner. At last a balance is brought, on which each of them lays a verse; but notwithstanding all the efforts of Euripides to produce heavy verses, those of Æschylus always make the scale of his rival kick the beam. At last he becomes impatient of the conflict, and proposes that Euripides himself, with all his works, his wife, children, and Kephisophon, shall get into one scale, and he will only put into the other two verses. Bacchus has in the mean time been gained over to Æschylus; and although he swore to Euripides that he would take him back from the world below, he dismisses him with a parody of one of his own verses in Hippolytus:

The tongue swore, however I make choice of Æschylus.

Æschylus consequently returns to the living, and delivers over the tragic throne in his absence to Sophocles.

The observation on the changes of place, which I made when mentioning *Peace*, may be here repeated. The scene is first at Thebes, of which both Bacchus and Hercules were natives; the stage is afterwards changed, without its ever being left by Bacchus, to the nearest side of the Acherusian lake, which must have been represented by the opening of the orchestra, and it was not till Bacchus landed at the other end of the logeum that the decorations represented the world below, with the palace of Pluto in the back ground. This is not a mere conjecture, it is expressly stated by the old scholiast.

The *Wasps* is in my opinion the feeblest piece of Aristophanes. The subject is too limited, the folly represented appears a disease of too singular a description, without a sufficient universality of application, and the action is drawn out to too great a length. The poet speaks this time in very modest language of his means of entertainment, and does not even promise us an immoderate laughter.

On the other hand, the *Birds* transports us, by one of the boldest and richest inventions, into the kingdom of the fantastically wonderful, and delights us with a display of the gayest hilarity: it is a merry, rapid, and highly varied composition. I cannot agree with the old critic in thinking that this work is chiefly characterised by its general and undisguised satire on the corruptions of the Athenian state, and of all human institutions. It seems rather to be marked by a display of the most harmless pranks, in which gods as well as mortals participate, and the poet does not seem to have had any particular aim in view. Whatever in natural history, in mythology, in the doctrine of divination, in the fables of Æsop, or even in proverbial expressions, contained any thing remarkable with relation to birds, has been ingeniously drawn by the poet within his circle; he goes even back to cosmogony, and shows that at first the raven-winged night laid a wind-egg, over which the lovely Eros, with golden pinions (without doubt a bird), brooded, and thence occasioned the origin of all things. Two fugitives of the human race fall into the dominion of the birds, who resolve to revenge them-

selves on them for the numerous cruelties which they have suffered: the two men contrive to save themselves by convincing the birds of their pre-eminency over all other creatures, and they advise them to collect all their strength in one immense state; the wondrous city, Cloudecuckooburg, is then built above the earth; all sorts of unbidden guests, priests, poets, soothsayers, geometers, scribes, sycophants, wish to nestle in the new state, but are driven out; new gods are appointed, naturally enough, after the image of the birds, as those of men bore a resemblance to themselves; the old gods are shut out from Olympus, so that no odour of sacrifices can reach them; in their emergency, they send an embassy, consisting of the carnivorous Hercules, Neptune, who, according to the common expression, swears by Neptune, and a Thracian god, who is not very familiar with Greek, but speaks a sort of mixed jargon; but yet these gods are under the necessity of submitting to the proposed conditions, and the sovereignty of the world remains to the birds. However much all this resembles a mere farcical joke, it may be said however to have this philosophical signification, that it considers all things from above in a sort of bird's-eye view, whereas the most of our ideas are only true in a human point of view.

The old critics were of opinion that *Cratinus* was powerful in living satire and direct attack, but that he was deficient in a pleasant humour, in the talent of developing his subject in an advantageous manner, and filling up his pieces with the neces-

sary details; that *Eupolis* was agreeable in his jocularity, and skilful in the use of ingenious allusions and contrivances, so that he never even needed the assistance of the parabasis to say whatever he chose, but that he was deficient in satirical force; that Aristophanes, by a happy middle course, united the advantages of both, and that in him we have satire and pleasantry combined in the most perfect and attractive manner. From these statements I conceive myself justified in assuming that among the pieces of Aristophanes, the *Horsemen* is the most in the style of *Cratinus*, and the *Birds* the nearest to the style of *Eupolis*; and that he had their respective manners in view when he composed these pieces. For although he boasts of his independent originality, and of his never borrowing any thing from others, it was hardly possible that among such distinguished associates, all mutual influence should be excluded. If the opinion to which I have alluded is well founded, we have to lament the loss of the works of Cratinus, perhaps principally for the light which they threw on the manners of the times, and the knowledge which they displayed of the Athenian constitution, and the loss of the works of Eupolis, chiefly for the comic form in which they were delivered.

Plutus was one of the earlier pieces of the poet, but as we have it, it is one of his last works; for the first piece was afterwards recast by him. In its essence it belongs to the old comedy, but in the springiness of personal satire, and in the mild tone prevails throughout the whole, we may

perceive an approximation to the middle comedy. The old comedy was first decisively suppressed by a formal enactment, but before this event Aristophanes may have deemed it prudent to avoid exercising his democratical prerogative in all its extent. It has even been said (perhaps without any foundation, as the circumstance has been denied by others) that Alcibiades ordered Eupolis to be drowned on account of a piece which he had aimed at him. Dangers of this description would repress the most ardent zeal of authorship: it is but just that those who are desirous of affording pleasure to their fellow citizens should at least be secure in their lives.

APPENDIX

TO THE

SIXTH LECTURE.

AS we do not, so far as I know, possess any thing like a satisfactory poetical translation of Aristophanes, and as this author, for many reasons, will ever be untranslatable, I have been induced to communicate to my readers the scene in the *Acharnæ*, in which Euripides makes his appearance; not because this piece does not contain many other scenes of equal, if not superior merit, but because it has a reference to the character of this tragedian as an artist, and because it is both free from indecency, and may be easily understood.

The Acharnians, a country people of Attica, who have suffered a great deal from the enemy, are highly enraged at Dikaiopolis on account of the peace which he has concluded with the Lacedæmonians, and have determined to stone him. He undertakes to speak for the Lacedæmonians, remaining all the time behind a block, that he may lose his head if he does not succeed in convincing them. On account of this ticklish undertaking, he calls on Euripides, for the purpose of obtaining from him the tattered garments in which his heroes were in the habit of exciting commiseration. We must suppose the house of the tragic poet to occupy the middle of the back ground.*

* The translation of M. Schlegel is in a sort of free measure, which, as far as my limited knowledge of German parody will allow me to judge, seems to resemble that of the original. The nearest approximation to the ancient Iambic, which would be

DIKAIOPOLIS.

It is now time to pluck up a valiant resolution,
And therefore must I pay a visit to Euripides.
Boy, boy!

KEPHISOPHON (*appears*).

Who is there?

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Is Euripides within?

395

KEPHISOPHON.

He is within, and yet not within, if you can understand that.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

How within and not within?

KEPHISOPHON.

It is all very true however, old man.

His mind is out collecting verses,*

And not within. But he himself is aloft composing
A tragedy.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

O thrice fortunate Euripides,

400

Who possessest a servant of such shrewd discernment.
Call him.

KEPHISOPHON.

It is impossible.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

But you must—

I will not go, but continue to knock at the door.

Euripides, my little Euripides!†

Hear me if ever you heard any man.

405

Dikaiopolis calls you, the Chollidian, I.

EURIPIDES.

I have not time.

tolerated in English, is our blank verse; but I have confined myself to a translation in prose, in which the line of Greek is contained in the line of English.—TRANS.

* The Greek diminutive *ἐυρίπιδος* is here correctly expressed by the German *verschen*, but I suspect versicle would not be tolerated in English.—TRANS.

† *Εὐριπίδης*—in the German *Euripidelein*.—TRANS.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Come roll yourself out.*

EURIPIDES.

It is impossible.†

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Come consent.

EURIPIDES.

Well, I will roll myself out. I have not time to come down.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Euripides.

EURIPIDES.

Why do you bawl so.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

What! you are composing aloft then, 410

Instead of below. You are famous at representing the lame.

Have you the rags there you use in tragedies,

The dress of commiseration? You are the man for beggars!

I kneel down in supplication to you, Euripides.

Give me the rags of one of your old plays; 415

I have a long speech to make to the chorus,

And if I do not succeed I must expect death.

EURIPIDES.

What rags do you want? Those in which old Cæneus,

That unfortunate old man, stood the combat?

DIKAIOPOLIS.

No, it was not Cæneus, but a person still more wretched. 420

EURIPIDES.

Those of the blind Phœnix?

DIKAIOPOLIS.

No, not Phœnix, no:

It was another, still more miserable than Phœnix.

EURIPIDES.

What sort of rags does the man want?

O! you mean those of the beggar Philoctetus.

* A technical expression from the Encyclema, which was thrust out.

† Euripides appears in the upper story; but as in an *allana*, or sitting in an open gallery.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

No, but a person still more beggarly. 425

EURIPIDES.

You mean perhaps the sordid habiliments
In which the lame Bellerophon was attired ?

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Not Bellerophon. The man I mean
Was lame, demanded alms, garrulous, and bold of speech.

EURIPIDES.

O! I know—Telephus the Mysian—

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Ay, Telephus. 430

Give me this man's apparel, I beseech you.

EURIPIDES.

Boy, give him the rags of Telephus,
They lie there, above the rags of Thyestes,
And under those of Inous.

KEPHISOPHON.

Here! take them away.

DIKAIOPOLIS (*clothing himself in them*).

O Jupiter, who lookest down on, and seest through every
thing,* 435

Assist me in equipping myself most miserably.

Euripides, as you have favoured me with these,

Give me also the concomitants of the rags :

The little Mysian cap to put upon my head ;

For to-day I must look like a beggar, 440

Yet still remain who I am, though I do not appear so.†

The spectators must know who I am,

But the chorus stand round like fools,

That I may tickle them with my rhetorical flowers.

EURIPIDES.

I will give it to you ; for your contrivance is admirable. 445

* Allusion to the holes in the mantle, while he holds it up against the light.

† These two lines, and line 446, are taken from the tragedy of Telephus.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Hail to thee, Telephus! as far as I can perceive,
It succeeds: already I feel myself filling with elegancies of
expression.

But I still want the beggar's staff.

EURIPIDES.

Here, take it, and depart from these stone posts.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

O my mind, thou seest how I am driven from this habitation 450
In want of many little things. Become now
Tough and obstinate in beggary and praying. Euripides,
Give me a little basket in which a hole has been burnt by the
lanthorn.

EURIPIDES.

What occasion hast thou, O wretched man, for this basket?

DIKAIOPOLIS.

No occasion at all, but still I wish to take it. 455

EURIPIDES.

Begone now, leave the house, you become importunate.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Alas!

May you be as happy as ever your mother was.*

EURIPIDES.

Come, leave me now.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

No, you must give me one thing yet,
A little cup broken round the brim.

EURIPIDES.

There take it and begone. Know that you are now trouble-
some. 460

DIKAIOPOLIS.

Thou knowest not, by Zeus, the evils which thou occasionest.
But O! sweetest Euripides, still one thing yet,
Give me a little pot filled with fungi.

EURIPIDES.

O man, thou wilt carry off the whole tragedy.
Take it too, and depart.

* A poor retailer of vegetables.

DIKAIOPOLIS.

I go now. 465

But what am I to do? I must still have one thing, or if I have
it not,

I am ruined. Hear me, O sweetest Euripides!

When I have this I shall be gone, and not tease you longer.*

Give me the refuse cabbage leaves in the basket.†

EURIPIDES.

You ruin me. See there! My whole play has disappeared. 470

DIKAIOPOLIS (*appearing as if he wished to go*).

Nothing more now. Now I go. I am in truth very

Troublesome, not seeming to dread those who command.

O wretched man that I am, I am ruined! I have forgot

One thing, which of all others is the most important,

My dearest little Euripides! O my darling, 475

May I perish miserably, but I must still beg one thing from you,

One thing alone, this alone, this one thing alone:

Give me the chervil which you inherited from your mother.

EURIPIDES.

The man is insulting me—shut the door on him.

(*The Encyclema shuts, and Euripides and Kephisophon
retire into the house.*)

DIKAIOPOLIS.

O my mind, we must proceed without the chervil, 480

But art thou aware what a conflict awaits thee,

Having to plead the cause of the Lacedæmonians.

Proceed now, O my mind, behold the contest!

Why dost thou hesitate? hast thou not devoured Euripides?

Thou shalt be extolled. Come then, O wretched heart, 485

Repair thither, and there have thy head

In readiness for the block, saying what seems best to thee.

Courage! proceed! be of good cheer, my heart.

* This line is omitted in the German translation.—TRANS.

† This and line 479 allude to the employment of the mother
of Euripides.

LECTURE VII.

Whether the middle comedy was a distinct species.—Origin of the new comedy.—A mixed species.—Its prosaic character.—Whether versification is essential to comedy.—Subordinate kinds.—Pieces of character, and of intrigue.—The comic of observation, of self-consciousness, and arbitrary comic.—Morality of comedy.—Plautus and Terence as imitators of the Greeks here cited and characterised for want of the originals.—Moral and social aim of the Attic comedy.—Statues of two comic authors.

THE ancient critics mention the existence of a *middle comedy*, between the *new* and the *old*. Its distinctive peculiarities are variously stated: at one time in the abstinence from personal satire, and the introduction of real characters, and at another time in the dismissal of the chorus. The introduction of real persons under their true names was at no time an indispensable requisite. We find characters in many pieces, even of Aristophanes, in no respect historical, but altogether fictitious, with significant names in the manner of the new comedy, and personal satire is only occasionally resorted to. The right of personal satire was no doubt essential to the old comedy, as I have already attempted to show; and by losing this right the comic writers were no longer enabled to throw ridicule on public actions and the state. When they confined themselves to private life, the chorus

ceased to have any longer a signification. An accidental circumstance contributed to accelerate its removal. The dress and instruction of the chorus required a great out-lay; but when comedy came to forfeit its political privileges, and consequently also its festal dignity, and was degraded to a mere source of amusement, the poet found no longer any rich patrons to defray the expense of the chorus.

Platonius gives us still another trait of the middle comedy. On account of the danger of alluding to public affairs, the comic writers, he says, had turned all their powers of satire against serious poetry, both epic and tragic, and exposed its absurdities and contradictions; and the *Æolosikon* of Aristophanes, which was written at a late period of his life, was of such a kind. This description involves the idea of parody, which we included under the old comedy at our commencement. Platonius gives us the *Ulysses* of Cratinus, a burlesque of the *Odyssey*, as an instance. But no play of Cratinus could, in the order of time, belong to the middle comedy; for his death is mentioned by Aristophanes in his *Peace*. And as to the drama of Eupolis, in which he described what is called by us a Utopia, or lubberly land, what else was it but a parody of the poetical tales of the golden age? Are not the ascent to heaven of Trygæus, and the descent to hell of Bacchus in Aristophanes, ludicrous imitations of the deeds of Bellerophon and Hercules, sung in epic and tragic poetry? Many other parodies of tragic scenes might be mentioned. In the limitation to this peculiarity, we shall in vain seek for a

real and distinct line of separation. The frolicsome caprice, and allegoric signification of the composition are, poetically considered, the only essential peculiarities of the old comedy. Wherever we find them, we shall rank the work in this class, in whatever times, and under whatever circumstances, it may have been composed.

As the new comedy arose merely from the interdiction of the old, that is, the depriving it of its political freedom, we may easily conceive that an interval of vacillation, and endeavours to supply its place, would take place before a new comic form could be developed and fully established. Hence there may have been several kinds of the middle comedy, several gradations between the old and the new; and in this opinion some men of learning have concurred. This is therefore a matter of historical certainty; but in a technical point of view, a transition is not a separate kind.

We proceed therefore immediately to the new comedy, the species of poetry which with us receives the appellation of comedy. I imagine that we shall form a more correct notion of this species, if we consider it in connexion with the history of art, and from an examination of its various ingredients pronounce it mixed and conditional, than if we were to term it an original and pure species, as is done by those who either care nothing for the old comedy, or consider it as a mere rude commencement. Hence the infinite importance of Aristophanes, as we have in him what there is no other example of in the world.

The new comedy may, in certain respects, be described as the old, in a tamed state, but in productions of genius, tameness is not generally considered as praise. The new comic writers endeavoured to supply the place of the unconditional freedom of satire and gaiety, which was lost by a mixture of seriousness borrowed from tragedy, both in the form of the representation and general development, and in the impressions which they laboured to produce. We have seen that tragic poetry, in its last epoch, descended from its ideal elevation, and approached near to common reality, both in the characters and in the tone of the dialogue, but more especially in the endeavour after practical instruction respecting the manner in which civil and domestic life might best be regulated.—This attempt at utility in Euripides was ironically praised by Aristophanes.* Euripides was the precursor of the new comedy; and the poets of this species have always admired him in a particular manner, and acknowledged him as their master.—The similarity of tone and spirit is even so great, that moral maxims of Euripides have been ascribed to Menander, and of Menander to Euripides. On the other hand, we find among the fragments of Menander, consolations which rise to the height of the true tragic tone. •

Hence the new comedy is a mixture of seriousness and mirth.† The poet no longer himself turns

* The *Frogs*, v. 971—991.

† The original here is not susceptible of an exact translation into English. Though the German language has this great

poetry and the world into ridicule, he no longer gives himself up to a sportive and frolicsome inspiration, but endeavours to discover the ridiculous in the objects themselves; in human characters and their situations he paints what occasions mirth, in a word, what is pleasant and laughable. But it must no longer appear as the mere creation of his fancy, but seem probable, that is, real. Hence we must again modify the comic ideal of human nature which we laid down above by this law, and determine the different kinds and gradations of the comic accordingly.

The highest tragic seriousness, as I have already shown, runs always into the infinite; and the object of tragedy, properly speaking, is the struggle between the finite and outward existence, and the inward disposition which grasps at infinitude. The subdued seriousness of the new comedy, on the other hand, remains always within the circle of experience. The place of *fate* is supplied by *accident*, for such is the empirical idea of that which lies

advantage, that there are few ideas which may not be expressed in it in words of Teutonic origin, yet words derived from Greek and Latin are also occasionally used indiscriminately with the Teutonic synonyms, for the sake of variety or otherwise. Thus the generic word *spiel* (play), is formed into *lustspiel* (comedy), *trauerspiel* (tragedy), *sing-spiel* (opera), *schauspiel* (drama); but the Germans also use *tragædie*, *komædie*, opera and drama. In the text, the author proposes, for the sake of distinction, to give the name of *lustspiel* to the new comedy, to distinguish it from the old; but having only the single term comedy in English, I must, in translating *lustspiel*, make use of the two words, *new comedy*.—TRANS.

beyond our power or control. Hence we actually find among the fragments of the comic writers many expressions relative to *accident*, as in the tragedians respecting fate. To unconditional necessity, moral liberty could alone be opposed; accident was, by the understanding, to be made subservient to the advantage of the individual. On this account, the whole morality of the new comedy exactly resembles that of the fable; it is nothing more than prudence. In this sense, it was said by an ancient critic, with sufficient comprehension, and with inimitable brevity at the same time, that tragedy was the flight of life, comedy its regulation.

The idea of the old comedy is a fantastic illusion, a pleasant dream, which at last, with the exception of the general effect, all ends in nothing. The new comedy, on the other hand, is serious in its form. It rejects every thing of a contradictory nature, which might have the effect of destroying the impressions of reality. It endeavours after union and connexion, and it has, in common with tragedy, a formal developement and catastrophe. It connects together too, like tragedy, events, as causes and effects; but it connects them by the laws of experience, without any reference, as in tragedy, to one idea. As the latter endeavours to satisfy our feelings towards the conclusion, in like manner the new comedy endeavours to attain, at least, an apparent point of rest for the understanding. I may remark, in passing, that this is by no means an easy problem for the comic writer: he must contrive at last to get rid of the contradictions, with the com-

plication and intricacy of which we have been diverted, in a proper and suitable manner; when he attempts an actual equalisation by making all his fools reasonable, and by improving or punishing all those who are evil disposed, there is then an end of every thing like a pleasant and comical impression.

Such were the comic and tragic ingredients of the new comedy. There is yet a third however, which is in itself neither comic, nor tragic, nor even, generally speaking, of a poetic nature. I allude to the truth of the portraiture. The ideal and caricature, both in the plastic art and in dramatic poetry, lay claim to no other truth, than that of their signification; they must not seem real individual beings. Tragedy moves in an ideal, and the old comedy in a fanciful or fantastical world. As the creative power of the fancy was circumscribed in the new comedy, it became necessary to afford some equivalent to the understanding, and this consists in the probability of the subjects represented, on which the mind may exercise its powers of discrimination. I do not mean the calculation of the rarity or frequency of the subject which is represented (for without the liberty of depicting singularities, and with a rigid adherence to every-day life, comic amusement would be impossible), but the individual truth of the picture. The new comedy must be a true image of the manners of the day, and it must have a local and national determination; and although we see comedies of other times, and other nations, brought upon the stage, yet we still endeavour to trace this resemblance in

them, and are pleased when we find it. I do not mean, by the truth of the portrait, that the comic characters must be altogether individual. The most prominent features of different individuals of a class may be combined together in a certain degree of completeness, provided they are clothed with a sufficient degree of peculiarity to have an individual life, and are not represented as examples of an abstract idea. But in so far as the new comedy depicts the constitution of social and domestic life in general, it is a portrait; from this prosaical side it must be variously modified according to time and place, while the comic motives, from their poetical principle, remain ever the same.

The ancients have already acknowledged the new comedy as a faithful picture of life. Full of this idea, the grammarian Aristophanes exclaimed in a turn of expression somewhat affected, though highly ingenious: "O life and Menander! which of you two has imitated the other?" Horace informs us that it was doubted by some whether comedy could be styled a poem, because it neither in the subject, nor in the language, displayed the impressive elevation of other kinds of poetry, and the composition was merely distinguished from ordinary discourse by the versification. But it was urged by others that comedy occasionally elevated her tone, for instance, when an enraged father reproaches his son with his profligacy. This answer however is rejected by Horace as insufficient. "Would Pomponius," says he, with a biting application, "hear any thing else, were his father still alive?" To

answer the doubt, we must examine wherein the new comedy differs from individual reality. In the first place it is a fictitious whole, composed of congruous parts, agreeably to the scale of art. Moreover, the subject represented is handled according to the conditions of theatrical exhibition; every thing foreign and incongruous is separated, and the legitimate materials are subjected to a more rapid progress, than in real life; over the whole subject, situations as well as characters, a certain clearness and distinctness of appearance is thrown, which the fleeting and indeterminate shadowings of real life are seldom found to possess. This is what constitutes the poetical in the form of the new comedy; the prosaical principle lies in the materials, in the expected resemblance to somewhat that is individual and external.

We may now proceed to the consideration of the question which has given rise to so much dispute, whether versification is essential to comedy, and whether a comedy written in prose is an imperfect production. This question has been frequently answered in the affirmative on the authority of the ancients, who, it is true, had no theatrical productions in prose; but this might have arisen from accidental circumstances, for example, the great extent of the stage, in which verse from its more emphatic delivery, must have been better heard than prose. These critics forget that the *Mimi* of Sophron, so much admired by Plato, were written in prose. And what were these *Mimi*, if, from the allegation that some of the idyls of Theocritus were

an imitation of them in hexameters, we may venture to form any idea of them? They were pictures of real life, in which every appearance of poetry was most studiously avoided. This consists in the dramatic concatenation, which did not certainly take place in these pieces; they were mere detached scenes, in which one thing succeeded another accidentally, and without preparation, as the particular hour of any working-day or holiday brought it about. The want of dramatic interest was supplied by mimicry, that is, by the most accurate representation of individual peculiarities in action and language, which arose from nationality determined by local circumstances, and from sex, age, rank, and occupation.

Even in versified comedy, the language must, in the choice of words and phrases, differ very little, and in a manner that is hardly perceptible, from that of conversation; the freedoms of poetical expression, indispensable in other departments of poetry, are here inadmissible. The versification must not differ from the common, unconstrained, and negligent tone of conversation, and seem to be that which would first suggest itself. Its cadence must not serve to elevate the characters as in tragedy, where along with the unusual sublimity of the language, it becomes as it were a mental cothurnus. In comedy the verse must merely serve to give greater lightness, spirit, and elegance to the dialogue. The question whether a comedy ought to be versified or not, must be determined by the circumstance, whether it would be more suitable to the subject to give this degree of perfection of form to the dialogue,

or to imitate rhetorical and grammatical errors, and even the physical imperfections of speech. This last case however has not been so frequently the cause of producing comedies in prose in modern times, as the ease and convenience of the author, and in some degree also of the player. I would however recommend to my countrymen, the Germans, the diligent use of verse, and even of rhyme in comedy; for as we are yet seeking our national comic, without knowing very well where to find it, the whole composition would gain in worth, by the compression of the form, and we should be enabled to guard, in our very outset, against many important errors. We have not yet attained such a mastery in this matter as will allow us to resign ourselves to the guidance of an agreeable negligence.

As we have pronounced the new comedy a mixed species, formed of comic and tragic, poetic and prosaic elements, it is self evident that in the extent of this species, several subordinate species may exist, according to the preponderance of one or other of the ingredients. If the poet plays in a sportive humour with his own inventions, he produces a farce; if he confines himself to the ludicrous in situations and characters, carefully avoiding all serious admixtures, we shall have a pure comedy (*lustspiel*); in proportion as seriousness prevails in the aim of the whole composition, and in the interest and moral discrimination which it gives rise to, the piece becomes what is called instructive or sentimental comedy; and there is only another step to the familiar or civic tragedy. Great stress has

often been laid on the two last mentioned species as inventions entirely new, and of great importance, and peculiar theories have been devised for them; &c. In the lacrymose drama of Diderot; which was afterwards so much abused, the failure consisted altogether in that which was new : the affectation of nature, pedantry in the domestic relations, and the extravagant use of pathos. If we had the whole of the comic literature of the Greeks, we should, without doubt, find in it the models of all these species, with this difference, that the clear head of the Greeks never allowed them to fall into a chilling monotony, but regulated and mixed every thing with wise moderation. Have not we, among the very few remaining pieces, the *Captives* of Plautus, which may be called an affecting drama; the *Step-Mother* of Terence, a true family picture; while the *Amphitryo* borders on the fantastic boldness of the old comedy, and the *Twin-Brothers* (*Menæchmi*) is a wild piece of intrigue? Do we not find, throughout all the pieces of Terence, passages of a seriously instructive, impassioned, and affecting nature? We have only to call to mind the first scene of the *Heautontimorumenos*. We are hopeful that we shall find a due place for every thing, from our point of view. We see here no separated kinds, but merely gradations in the tone of the composition, which are marked by transitions, more or less perceptible.

Neither can we allow the common division into *pieces of character and intrigue*, to pass without some limitation. A good comedy ought always to

be both the one and the other, or it will be deficient either in strength or animation; though sometimes the one, and sometimes the other will, no doubt, preponderate. The developement of the comic character requires contrasted situations, and these again arise from the crossing of purposes and events, which, as I have already shown, constitutes intrigue in the dramatic sense. Every one knows the meaning of intriguing in common life; the leading others, by cunning and dissimulation, to assist our hidden views without their knowledge and against their will. In the drama we meet with both significations, for the cunning of the one becomes a crossing event for the other.

When the characters are only slightly sketched, merely as much as is necessary to warrant the actions of the characters in certain cases; when the incidents are so crowded, that little room is left for the developement of character; when the plot is brought forward in such a manner, that the strange complication of misunderstandings and embarrassments, seems every moment on the point of being cleared up, and yet the knot is again drawn tighter and tighter: such a composition may well be called a piece of intrigue. The French critics have made it fashionable to consider a piece of this kind as very much inferior in value to one of character, perhaps from their looking too much to what may be retained and carried home by us from a play. It is true, the piece of intrigue, in some degree, ends at last in nothing: but why should it not be permitted to sport in an ingenious manner, without

any other object? A good comedy of this description certainly requires a great display of inventive wit; besides the entertainment which we derive from the sight of so much acuteness and ingenuity, the wonderful tricks and delusions which are practised, possess a very great charm for the fancy, as has been proved by the example of many Spanish pieces.

It is objected to the piece of intrigue, that it deviates from the natural course of things, that it is improbable. We may admit the former however without also admitting the latter. The poet, no doubt, exhibits before us what is unexpected, extraordinary, and wonderful, even to incredibility; and he often sets out, even with a great improbability, as for example, the resemblance between two persons, or a disguise which is not seen through; but all the incidents must afterwards have the appearance of truth, and all the circumstances by means of which the affair takes such a wonderful turn, must be satisfactorily explained to us. As the poet, in proportion to the events which take place, gives us but a slight display of wit, we are the more strict with him respecting the *how* they are brought about.

In the comedies which are more of a characteristic nature, the characters must be grouped with art, that they may serve to throw light on each other. This however is very apt to degenerate into too systematical a method, where each character has his symmetrical contrast, and where by such means an unnatural appearance is given to the whole.

Neither are those comedies deserving of the highest praise, in which all the other persons seem merely introduced to allow, as it were, the principal character to go through his different probations; especially when that character consists of nothing but an opinion, or a habit (for instance, *l'optimiste*, *le distrait*), as if an individual could only consist of one single peculiarity, and not be determined by all his different properties.

I have already shown in what the sportive ideal of the old comedy consisted. As the new comedy ought to bear a resemblance to a definite reality, it must not indulge in the studied and arbitrary extravagance of the former species. It must seek for other sources of comic amusement, which lie nearer the province of seriousness, and these are to be found in a more accurate and thorough delineation of character.

In the characters of the new comedy, either the *comic of observation*, or the *self-conscious and confessed comic*, will be found to prevail. The former constitutes the more refined, or what is called high comedy, and the latter low comedy or farce. I shall explain myself more distinctly.

There are laughable peculiarities, follies, and perversities, of which the possessor himself is unconscious, and which, when he does perceive in any degree, he studiously endeavours to conceal, as being calculated to injure him in the opinion of others. Such persons do not consequently give themselves out for what they actually are; their secret escapes from them unwittingly, or against

their will ; and when the poet portrays them, he must lend us his own peculiar talent for observation, that we may attain a due knowledge of them. His art consists in allowing us to discover the character of the individual, by overhearing him, as it were, in his unguarded moments, and seizing on traits which have accidentally escaped him, and in placing the spectator in such a position, that however nice the observation may be, he can hardly fail to make it.

There are other moral defects, which are beheld by their possessor with a certain degree of satisfaction, and which he has even resolved not to remedy, but to cherish and preserve. Of this kind is all that, without reference to selfish pretensions, or hostile inclinations, merely originates in the preponderance of sensuality. This may, without doubt, be united to a high degree of intellect, and when such a person applies his mental powers to the consideration of his own character, laughs at himself, confesses his failings to others, or endeavours to reconcile them to them, by the droll manner in which they are mentioned, we have then an instance of the self-conscious comic. This kind always supposes a certain inward duality of character, and the superior half, which rallies and laughs at the other, has from its tone and its employment, a near affinity to the comic poet himself. He occasionally delivers over his functions entirely to this representative, while he allows him studiously to overcharge the picture which he draws of himself, and to enter into a sort of understanding with the spectators, to throw ridicule on the other cha-

racters. We have in this way the *arbitrary comic*, which generally produces a very powerful effect, however much the critics may affect to under-rate it. In the instance in question, the spirit of the old comedy prevails; the privileged fool or buffoon, who has appeared on almost all stages under different names, and whose character is at one time a display of shrewdness and wit, and at another of absurdity and stupidity, has inherited something of the extravagant inspiration, and the rights and privileges of the free and unrestrained old comic writer; and this is the strongest proof that the old comedy, which we have described as the original species, was not founded alone in the peculiar circumstances of the Greeks, but is essentially rooted in the nature of things.

To keep the spectators in a merry disposition, comedy must not clothe her characters with too much dignity, nor excite too deep an interest in their fate, for in both these cases an entrance will infallibly be given to seriousness. How is the poet to avoid agitating our moral feelings, when the actions represented are of a nature to give rise to disgust and contempt, or reverence and love? He must always range within the province of the understanding. He must contrast men with each other, as mere physical beings, that they may measure their powers against one another: I include of course the mental powers, and even allude to them more particularly. In this, comedy bears the nearest affinity to fable: in the fable we have animals endowed with reason, and in comedy we have men with their understanding

subservient to their animal propensities. By animal propensities, I mean sensuality, and in a still more general sense, self-love. As heroism and self-devotion elevate the character to the tragic, the comic characters, on the other hand, are complete egoists. This must however be understood with due limitation: we do not mean that comedy never portrays the social inclinations, but only that it represents them as originating in the natural endeavour after our own happiness. Whenever the poet goes beyond this, he leaves the comic tone. He is not to direct our feelings to the dignity or meanness, the innocence or corruption, the goodness or baseness of the characters; but to show us whether they act stupidly or wisely, suitably or unsuitably, with silliness or ability.

Examples will serve to place the thing in the clearest light. We possess an involuntary and immediate respect for truth, and this belongs to the most deep-rooted emotions of morality. A lie undertaken for a base purpose, and which threatens dangerous consequences, fills us with the highest disgust, and belongs to tragedy. Why then are cunning and deceit admitted as excellent comic motives, supposing that they are used with no bad design, but merely for purposes of self-love, to extricate the party from a dilemma, or to attain some object, and that no dangerous consequences are to be dreaded? It is because the deceiver is already beyond the limits of the moral sphere, because truth and untruth are in themselves equally indifferent to him, being only considered in the light of means;

and we are merely entertained with the display of sharpness and ready wittedness which are requisite to carry on the deceit. It is still more amusing, when the deceiver is himself caught in his own snare; for instance, when he is a liar, but has a bad memory. On the other hand, error, when not seriously dangerous, is a comic situation, more especially when this disease of the understanding proceeds from a previous abuse of the mental powers, from vanity, folly, or perversity. When deceit and error cross one another, and are by that means multiplied, excellent comic situations are produced. Two men for instance meet for the purpose of deceiving one another; both however are previously warned, and on their guard, and both go away deceived with respect to the success of their deceit. Or the one wishes to betray the other, but tells him unwittingly the truth; that other person is suspicious, and falls into the snare, merely from being so much on his guard. We might in this way lay down a sort of comic grammar, and show how the separate motives are swallowed up in one another, with a perpetually increased effect, till we come to the most artificial constructions. We should find, perhaps, in this way, that the complication of misunderstandings which constitutes a comedy of intrigue, is by no means so contemptible a part of the comic art, as the advocates of the comedies of character are pleased to assert.

Aristotle describes the laughable as an imperfection, an impropriety which is not productive of any essential injury. Excellent! for from the moment

that we entertain a true sympathy with the characters, the comic tone is at an end. The comic misfortune must not exceed an embarrassment, which is at last got rid of, or at most a merited humiliation. Of this description are certain corporal means of improvement applied to grown people, which our more refined, or at least more fastidious age will not tolerate on the stage, but of which Molière, Holberg, and other masters, have diligently availed themselves. The comic effect of this application arises from our having a pretty conspicuous demonstration of the dependence of the mind on external things; we have a practical manifestation, as it were, of the motives of action. This discipline in comedy corresponds with a violent death in tragedy, submitted to with heroic magnanimity. In the one case, the resolution remains unshaken amidst all the horrors of annihilation; the man perishes, but his principles survive; in the other case, the bodily existence remains uninjured, but an instantaneous change of sentiments is operated.

As comedy must place the spectator in a point of view altogether different from that of moral dignity, with what right can we demand moral instruction from comedy, with what ground can we even expect such instruction? When we examine more clearly the maxims of morality of the Greek comic writers, we shall find that they are all of them founded on experience. We do not however attain a knowledge of our duties from experience; we

have an immediate conviction of them from conscience; experience can only enlighten us with respect to what is advantageous or disadvantageous. The instruction of comedy does not turn on the dignity of the aim, but the sufficiency of the means. It is, as has been already said, the doctrine of prudence; the morality of result, and not of nature. Morality, in its genuine acceptance, is essentially related to tragedy.

Many philosophers have reproached comedy with immorality, and among others, Rousseau, in his eloquent letter on the drama. The aspect of the actual course of things in the world is, no doubt, far from edifying; it is not however exhibited in comedy as a model for our imitation, but as a warning and admonition to us. It may be called the practical part of morality, the art of living. Whoever is unacquainted with the world is perpetually in danger of making the most erroneous application of moral principles to individual cases, and, with the very best intentions in the world, of occasioning much mischief both to himself and others. Comedy sharpens our powers of discrimination, and gives us an acquaintance with persons and situations; that is, it makes us wiser; and this is the true and only morality which it can possibly inculcate.

So far with respect to the investigation of the general idea, which must serve us as a clue to determine the merits of the different poets. I shall not be long occupied in considering the small por-

tion of the new comedy of the Greeks, which has come down to us in fragments, or in the copies of Roman writers. The Greek literature was extremely rich in this department: the mere list of the comic writers whose works are lost, and of the names of those works, so far as they are known to us, makes of itself a dictionary of no small magnitude. Although the new comedy developed itself, and flourished only in the short interval between the end of the Peloponnesian war, and the first successors of Alexander the Great, yet the stock of pieces amounted to some thousands; but time has made such havoc in this superfluity of works of ingenuity and wit, that nothing remains but a number of detached fragments in the original language, which are frequently disfigured in such a manner as not to be intelligible, and about twenty translations or copies of Greek originals in Plautus, and six in Terence. The labours of criticism might be here, with propriety, employed in endeavouring to deduce, from a careful consideration of the whole of the traces which we possess, something like a just estimate and characterisation of what we have lost. The chief point in a labour of this kind, I can take upon me to mention. The fragments and maxims of the comic writers are in their versification and language distinguished for the utmost purity, elegance, and accuracy; the tone of society in them is characterised by a certain Attic grace. The Latin comic poets again are negligent in their versification, and the idea of it is almost lost in the many metrical freedoms taken by them. Even in lan-

guage, they are deficient in cultivation and polish, at least Plautus is. Several learned Romans, and Varro among others, have, it is true, praised the style of this poet, but we must learn to distinguish between philological and poetical approbation.—Plautus and Terence were among the most ancient Roman writers, and belonged to a time when the language of books was hardly yet in existence, and when every thing was drawn fresh from life. This *naïve* simplicity had its charms in the eyes of those Romans, who belonged to the period of learned cultivation: but it was much more a natural gift than the fruit of poetical art. Horace condemns this excessive partiality, and asserts that Plautus and the other comic poets were negligent in the composition of their pieces, and wrote them in the utmost haste, that they might be the sooner paid. We may safely affirm therefore that in the graces and elegances of execution, the Greek poets have always lost in the Latin imitations. We must re-translate these in idea, into the finished elegance which we perceive in the fragments. Besides, Plautus and Terence made many changes in the general plan, which would hardly be improvements. The former omitted, at times, scenes and characters, and the latter made additions, and melted down two plays into one. Was this done with the view of improvement in their art, and were they actually desirous of excelling their Grecian predecessors in the structure of their pieces? I am doubtful of this. In Plautus every thing ran out into breadth, and he was obliged to remedy in some other way

the lengthening which this gave to the original; the imitations of Terence on the other hand, from his want of facility and invention, turned out somewhat bald, and the gaps were filled up by him with materials derived from different pieces. He was even reproached by his contemporaries with having falsified and destroyed a number of Grecian pieces, for the purpose of making a few Latin ones out of them.

Plautus and Terence are generally mentioned as writers, in every respect, original. The Romans were to be forgiven for this: they possessed but little of a peculiar poetical spirit, and this poetical literature owed its origin, for the most part, first to translation, then to a freer imitation, and finally to an appropriation and new modelling of the Greek. They allowed therefore a particular sort of translation to pass for originality. We find in the apologetic prologues of Terence, as an excuse for his plagiarism, that he was accused of it, because he had again made use of a subject already translated from the Greek. As we cannot however now consider these writers in the light of creative artists, and as they are only important to us in so far as we are enabled through their means to become acquainted with the shape of the new Grecian comedy, I shall take this opportunity of saying a few words with respect to their character, and then return to the consideration of the new Greek comic writers.

Among the Greeks, the poets and artists lived at all times in the most honourable relations; among the Romans however, polite literature was at first

cultivated by men of the lowest rank, by needy foreigners, and even by slaves. Plautus and Terence, who lived nearly about the same period, towards the end of the second Punic war, and in the interval between the second and third, were of the lowest rank: the former, a miserable day-labourer, and the latter, a Carthaginian slave, and afterwards a freed man. Their fortunes however were very different. Plautus was obliged to hire himself out in the intervals, when he was not employed in writing comedies, as a beast of burden in a hand-mill; Terence became the inmate of the elder Scipio and his bosom friend Lælius, and they deigned to admit him to such a degree of familiarity, that he was charged with being assisted by these noble Romans in the composition of his pieces, and it was even said that they allowed their own labours to pass under his name. The habits of their lives are perceivable in their respective modes of writing: the bold roughness of Plautus, and his famed jests, betray his intercourse with the lower classes; in Terence, again, we can discern the trace of good society. They are to be distinguished also from the choice of the pieces on which they employed themselves. Plautus generally inclines to the farcical and the exaggerated, and often to disgusting drollery; Terence prefers the delicately characteristic, and the moderate, and he approaches the seriously instructive and sentimental kind. Some of the pieces of Plautus are taken from *Diphilus* and *Philemon*, but we have reason to believe that he added a considerable degree of

coarseness to his originals; from whom he derived the others we know not, except we are to consider ourselves warranted by the assertion of Horace, "it is said that Plautus took for his model the Sicilian Epicharmus," in conjecturing that he borrowed the *Amphitryo*, a piece which is of quite a different kind from the others, and which he himself calls a tragi-comedy, from the old Doric comic writer, who employed himself chiefly on mythological subjects. Among the pieces of Terence, whose copies, with the exception of changes in the composition, are probably much more faithful in detail than those of the other, we find two from Apollodorus, and the rest from Menander. Julius Cæsar has honoured Terence with some verses, in which he calls him a half Menander, praising the smoothness of his style, and only lamenting that he has lost a certain comic strength, which belonged to his original.

This naturally brings us back to the Grecian masters. Diphilus, Philemon, Apollodorus, and Menander, are certainly four of the most celebrated names among them. The palm, for elegance, delicacy, and sweetness, is with one voice given to Menander, although Philemon frequently carried off the prize from him, probably, because he wrote more in the taste of the multitude, or because he availed himself of adventitious means of success. This was at least insinuated by Menander, who when he met his rival one day said to him: "Pray Philemon, dost thou not blush, when thou obtainest the victory over me?"

Menander flourished after Alexander the Great, and he was the contemporary of Demetrius Phalereus. He was instructed in philosophy by Theophrastus, but his inclinations led him to that of Epicurus, and he boasted in an epigram, "that if Themistocles freed his country from slavery, Epicurus freed it from irrationality." He was fond of the choicest sensual enjoyments : Phædrus describes him to us in an unfinished tale, as betraying, even in his exterior, all the marks of a vicious effeminacy ; and his love intrigue with the coquette Glycera is well known. The Epicurean philosophy, which placed the highest felicity of life in the benevolent affections, but which neither spurred men on to heroic action, nor allowed them to feel the want of it, could hardly fail to be well received among the Greeks, after the loss of their old and glorious freedom : it was admirably calculated to operate as a consolation to them, with their cheerful and mild way of thinking. It is perhaps the most suitable for the comic poet, as the stoical philosophy is for the tragedian. The object of the former is merely to produce mitigated impressions, and by no means to excite a strong degree of discontent with human infirmities. We may easily conceive too why the Greeks conceived a passion for the new comedy at the very period when they lost their freedom, as it drew them from a participation in human affairs in general, and political events, and absorbed their attention wholly in domestic and personal concerns. The Grecian theatre was originally formed for the higher walks of the drama ; and we will not

attempt to dissemble its inconveniences and disadvantages for comedy. The frame was too wide, and it was impossible for the picture to fill it. The Greek stage was open to the heavens, and it exhibited little or nothing of the interior of the houses.* Comedy was therefore under the necessity of placing the scene in the street. This gives rise to many inconveniences; people frequently come out of their houses to confide their secrets to one another in the streets. By such means, it is true, the poets were spared the necessity of changing the scene, as it was taken for granted that the families concerned in the action lived in the same neighbourhood. It may be urged in justification, that the Greeks, like all other southern nations, lived much out of their private houses, in the open air. The chief disadvantage with which this construction of the stage was attended, was the

* The encyclema must, in some degree, have served for this purpose, as we can have no doubt that, in the commencement of the *Clouds*, Strepsiades and his son were seen sleeping on their beds. Moreover, Julius Pollux mentions among the particulars of the decoration of a comedy, a sort of tent, hut, or shed, with a gate, originally a stable adjoining to the middle edifice, but afterwards applicable to many purposes. In the *Semproresses of Aristophanes*, it represents a sort of workshop. Here, or in the encyclema, entertainments were given, which in the old comedies sometimes took place before the eyes of the spectators. With the southern habits of the ancients, it was not, perhaps, so unnatural to feast with open doors, as it would be in the north of Europe. But no modern commentator has yet, so far as I know, endeavoured to illustrate in a proper manner the theatrical regulation of the pieces of Plautus and Terence.

circumscription of the female parts. If the costume was to be observed, which the essence of the new comedy required, the retired manner of living of the female sex in Greece rendered the exclusion of unmarried women, and young women in general, altogether unavoidable. No other females could appear but aged mothers, servant-maids, or courtesans. Besides depriving the audience of many agreeable situations, this other inconvenience is produced, that the whole piece frequently turns on a marriage, or a passion for a young woman, who is never once seen from the beginning to the end of it.

Athens, where the fictitious, as well as the actual scenes were generally placed, was the centre of a small territory, and in no wise to be compared with our great cities, either in extent or population. The republican equality admitted no marked distinction of ranks; there were no proper nobility, all were alike citizens, richer or poorer, and for the most part, had no other occupation than that of managing their properties. Hence the Attic comedy could not well admit of the contrasts arising from diversity of tone and cultivation; it generally continues in a sort of middle state, and has something citizen-like, nay, if I may so say, something of the manners of a small town about it, which we do not see in those comedies, in which the manners of a court, and the refinement or corruption of monarchical capitals are portrayed.

With respect to the intercourse between the two sexes, the Greeks were neither acquainted with the gallantry of modern Europe, nor the union of love

and enthusiastic respect and adoration. All ended in sensual passion or marriage. The latter was, by the constitution and manners of the Greeks, much more a matter of duty, or an affair of convenience, than of inclination. The laws were only strict in one point, the preservation of the native origin of the children, which was alone legitimate. The civic right was a great prerogative, the more valuable the smaller the number of citizens, and this number was therefore not allowed to increase beyond a certain point. Hence marriages with foreign women were not valid. The society of a wife, who frequently had not even been once seen before marriage, and who had passed her whole life within the walls of a house, could not be productive of much entertainment; this was sought after among women who were entitled to less ceremony, and who were generally foreigners without property, or persons who had obtained their emancipation, &c. The indulgent morality of the Greeks admitted of almost every degree of freedom with women of this description, especially in the case of young and unmarried men. The old comic authors exhibited this way of living in a more undisguised way than we think consistent with decency. Their comedies frequently end, like all comedies in the world, with marriages (it seems this catastrophe brings seriousness along with it); but with them marriage is frequently only a means of reconciliation with a father for the irregularities of an interdicted amour. It sometimes happens, however, that the amour is changed into a lawful

marriage by means of a discovery that the female, supposed to be a foreigner or slave, was by birth an Athenian citizen. It deserves to be remarked that, to the fruitful mind of the poet who carried the old comedy to perfection, the first germ of the new comedy is to be attributed. *Kocalus*, the last piece which Aristophanes composed, contained a seduction, a recognition, and all the leading circumstances which were afterwards imitated by Menander.

From what we have premised, we may at once see nearly the whole circle of characters ; nay, those which perpetually recur are so few, that they may be almost all of them here enumerated. The austere and frugal, or the mild and yielding father, the latter not unfrequently under the dominion of his wife, and making common cause with his son ; the house-wife either loving and sensible, or obstinate and domineering, and proud of the accession brought by her to the family property ; the giddy and extravagant, but open and amiable young man, who even in a passion sensual at its very commencement is capable of true attachment ; the vivacious girl, who is either thoroughly depraved, vain, cunning, and selfish ; or still well disposed, and susceptible of higher emotions ; the simple and boorish, or the cunning slave, who assists his young master to deceive his old father, and obtain money for the gratification of his passions by all manner of tricks ; (*as this person plays a principal part, we shall shortly state some further observations respecting him*) ; the flatterer or accommodating pa-

rasite, who, for the sake of a good meal, is ready to say or do any thing that may be required of him; the sycophant, a man whose business it was to set quietly disposed people by the ears, and stir up law-suits, for which he offered his services; the braggart soldier, who returns from foreign service, generally cowardly and simple, but who assumes airs from the fame of the deeds performed by him abroad; and lastly, a servant or pretended mother, who preaches up a bad system of morals to the young girl entrusted to her guidance; and the slave-dealer, who speculates on the extravagant passions of young people, and knows no other object than the furtherance of his own selfish views. The two last characters, from their rough and contumacious perversity, are, to our feelings, a true blemish in the new Grecian comedy; but it was impossible, from the manner in which it was constituted, to dispense with them.

The cunning servant is generally also the buffoon, who confesses his own sensuality, and his want of principle, with a degree of self-satisfaction and exaggeration, and who jokes at the expence of the other characters, and even occasionally addresses the pit. This is the origin of the comic servants of the moderns, but I am inclined to doubt whether, with our manners, we are warranted by propriety and truth, in introducing such a character. The Greek servant was a slave, exposed for life to the arbitrary caprice of his master, and frequently subjected to the most severe treatment. We willingly pardon the man, deprived by the laws of all his

original rights, who makes trick and artifice his trade: he is in a state of war with his oppressors, and cunning is his natural weapon. But in our times, a servant, free in the choice of his station and his master, who assists the son in carrying on a scheme to deceive the father, is a good for nothing scoundrel. With respect to the open confession of sensuality, which in other productions is used for giving the comic stamp to servants and persons in low situations, it may be allowed to be continued without impropriety: of those who have few privileges in life, we are not disposed to exact much; and they may boldly own the vulgarity of their inclinations, without giving any shock to our moral feelings. The better the condition of servants in real life, the less they are adapted for the stage; and it is to the praise of our more humane age, that in our family pictures, we see servants of the most respectable characters, who are better adapted for exciting tears than laughter.

The repetition of the same characters was acknowledged by the Greek comic writers, in their frequent use of the same name, and a name which was in part expressive of the character. In this they did better than many comic poets of modern times, who, for the sake of novelty of character, torture themselves in an endeavour to attain complete individuality, by which they seldom produce any other effect than that of drawing our attention from the main business of the piece, and wasting it on accessary circumstances. They fall imperceptibly back again into the old and well known

character. It is better to delineate the characters with a certain breadth, and to leave room to the actor to determine them more accurately, and to enter more fully into their spirit, according to the nature of each composition. In this respect the use of masks admits of justification. Masks and the other peculiarities of the ancient theatre, such as the acting in the open air, were originally calculated for other departments of the drama, and may seem a greater incongruity in the new comedy than in the old, and in tragedy. It was certainly however unsuitable to the spirit of the new, that, while in other respects it approached nearer to real nature, the masks deviated more from it than in the old, were more overcharged in the features, and bore a greater resemblance to caricature. However astonishing this may appear to us, it has been attested in too express and formal a manner* to allow us to entertain any^d doubt of it. As they were prohibited from bringing portraits of real persons on the stage after the loss of their freedom, they were always afraid lest they might accidentally stumble upon some resemblance, and especially to any of their Macedonian rulers, and this was the mode in which they endeavoured to secure themselves. Yet the exaggeration in question would hardly be without its meaning. We find it accordingly stated, that an unequal profile, with one eyebrow drawn up and the other down, was expressive of useless and intermeddling ac-

* See Platonius, in *Aristoph. cur.* Küster. p. xi.

tivity,* and we may in fact remark that men, who are in the habit of looking at things with anxious accuracy, are apt to acquire such distortions.

Among other peculiarities the masks in comedy have this advantage, that on the inevitable re-appearance of characters the spectator knows at once what he has to expect. I was once present at a representation at Weimar, of the *Brothers of Terence*, entirely in the ancient costume, which, under the direction of Goëthe, furnished us a truly Attic evening. Partial masks, fixed in a suitable manner to the real countenance, were made use of;† and notwithstanding the smallness of the theatre, I did not find that they were in any way destructive of comic effect. The mask was peculiarly favourable for the jokes of the cunning slave: his uncouth physiognomy, as well as his apparel, stamped him for an individual of a peculiar race, as the Grecian slaves, in some sort, were even from extraction, and they might therefore be allowed to speak and act in a different manner from the rest of the people.

From the limited circle of their civil and do-

* See *Jul. Pollux*, in the section of comic masks. Compare Platonius in the place cited, and Quinctilian, l. xi. c. 3. The supposed wonderful discovery of Voltaire respecting tragic masks, which I mentioned in the third lecture, will hardly be forgotten.

† This was not unknown to the ancients, as is proved by many comic masks with a circular opening of considerable width, through which the mouth and the adjoining features were allowed to appear; and which, with their living motion, must have produced a highly ludicrous effect, from the contrast in the fixed distortion of the rest of the countenance.

mestic life, and the simple theme of the characters above mentioned, the invention of the Greek comic writers contrived to produce an inexhaustible diversity of variations, and yet they always, even in that on which they grounded their developement and catastrophe, remained true to their national costume, and on that account are deserving of very high praise.

The circumstances of which they availed themselves for this purpose were generally the following. Greece consisted of a number of small separate states, which lay round one another on sea coasts and islands. Navigation was frequent, piracy far from unusual, and human beings were procured in this way for the supply of the slave trade. Free-born children were either carried off from their parents, or exposed by them, in virtue of the right allowed to them by the law, and unexpectedly saved from destruction, and afterwards recovered by these parents. All this prepares us for the recognitions of parents and children, brothers and sisters, &c. which appear in the new Greek comedies, and which were borrowed by the comic writers from the tragedians. The subject of the plot is present, but the singular and improbable accident on which it is founded, is removed to a distance of time and place, so that the comedy, though taken from every-day life, has still, in some degree, a wonderful and romantic back ground.

The Greek comic writers were acquainted with comedy in all its latitude, and employed themselves

diligently on all the subordinate departments, the farce, the piece of intrigue, and the various gradations of pieces of character, from caricature to the most refined, and even the serious or sentimental drama. They possessed besides a most enchanting species, of which no examples are now remaining. We see from the titles of the pieces, and other circumstances, that they sometimes introduced historical persons, as the poetess Sappho, for instance, representing the love of Alcæus and Anacreon for her, and her passion for Phaon; the story of her leap from the Leucadian rock owes its origin perhaps to the comic writers alone. To judge from the objects of them, these comedies must have approached to our romantic drama; and the mixture of beautiful passion with the tranquil grace of the ordinary comedy must undoubtedly have been very attractive.

I conceive that in the above observations I have given a faithful picture of the Greek comedy; I have not attempted to disguise either its defects or its narrow limits. The antique tragedy, and old comedy are inimitable, and stand alone in the whole range of the history of art. But in the new comedy we may attempt to measure our strength with the Greeks, and even endeavour to surpass them. Whenever we descend from the Olympus of true poetry to the earth, that is, whenever we mix the prose of a definite reality with the ideal creations of fancy, the success of productions are no longer determined by mind, and a feeling for art,

but by circumstances of a more or less favourable nature. The figures of the gods of the Grecian sculptors are perfect models for all ages. The noble employment of giving an ideal perfection to the human form having once been embraced by the fancy, with an equal degree of inspiration we could only have a repetition of the same attempts. The modern statuary is however the rival of the ancient in personal and individual resemblances: but this is not a pure creation of art; observation must here come in for its share: and whatever degree of science, profundity, and taste may be displayed in the execution, the artist is still tied down to the subject actually before him.

In the admirable portrait-statues of two of the most celebrated comic writers of antiquity, *Menander* and *Posidippus* (formerly in the Vatican, and now in the Museum in Paris), it appears to me that the physiognomy of the new Greek comedy is almost visibly and personally expressed. They are sitting in arm chairs, with a roll in their hands, and in the most simple dress; with all the ease and security of a conscious superiority in their art; and in that maturity of age which is suitable for the impartial observation which is requisite for comedy, but yet hale and active, and free from all symptoms of caducity; we see in them that corporeal vigour, which is at once a proof of soundness of constitution of body and mind; no inspired enthusiasm, but at the same time nothing of folly or extravagance; a sage seriousness rather dwells

on the brow, which is not however wrinkled with care, but with the exercise of reflection ; yet in the alert look, and the willing smile on the mouth, we cannot mistake the indications of a playful irony.

LECTURE VIII.

Roman theatre.—Native kinds: Attellanic Fables, Mimi, Comedia Togata.—Greek tragedy transplanted to Rome.—Tragic authors of a former epoch, and of the Augustan age.—Idea of a national Roman tragedy.—Causes of the want of success of the Romans in tragedy.—Seneca.—The Italians.—Pastoral dramas of Tasso and Guarini.—Small progress in tragedy.—Metastasio and Alfieri.—Character of both.—Comedies of Ariosto, Aretin, Porta.—Improvisatore masks.—Goldoni.—Gozzi.—Latest state.

IN the preceding part of these Lectures, we have been occupied with an investigation into the nature of the drama in general, and its peculiar appearance among the Greeks, whose stage was not only original, but carried to the utmost degree of perfection. In entering upon a consideration of the dramatic literature of other nations, we must in general express ourselves with greater brevity; and in doing so, we are not afraid that we shall be accused of either disproportionate length or conciseness.

And first, with respect to the Romans, whose theatre immediately follows that of the Greeks, we have only, as it were, to notice one great gap, which is partly owing to their want of creative powers in this department, and partly to the loss of all their theatrical productions, with the exception of a few fragments. The only works of the good classical times, which have descended to us, are

those of *Plautus* and *Terence*, whom I have already characterised as *copyists* of the Greeks.

The Romans could not be said to have had a poetry of their own native growth, as it was first artificially cultivated among them along with other luxuries, when the original character of Rome was nearly extinguished by an imitation of foreign manners. We have in the Latin, the example of a language modelled into poetical expression, according to foreign grammatical and metrical forms. This imitation of the Greek bore at first the marks of great violence and constraint: the Græcism was carried the length of a clumsy intermixture of the two languages. The poetical style was gradually softened down, and we still perceive in Catullus the last traces of its early harshness, which are not however without a certain stately attraction. Those constructions, and those compound words more especially, which were too much at variance with the internal structure of the Latin, and which were grating to the Roman ear, were in time thrown out, and the poets at length succeeded in the age of Augustus, in producing the most agreeable combination of the peculiarities of the two languages. Hardly however had this equilibrium been attained, when all free developement was at a stand, and the poetical expression, notwithstanding an apparent advance to greater boldness and learning, was irrevocably confined within the circle of those modes of expression which had once received the sanction of public approbation. The Latin poetical language therefore flourished only

during the short interval which elapsed between the period of its formation and its death; and with respect to the spirit of the poetry, its fate cannot be said to have been more successful.

The Romans were not led to the invention of theatrical amusements, from the want of representations to fill up the leisure of their festivals, and to enliven the mind by withdrawing it from the concerns of life; but in the despondency of a desolating pestilence, against which all remedies seemed insufficient, they had recourse to the theatre, as a means of appeasing the anger of the gods, having previously been only acquainted with gymnastic exercises, and circus races. The *histriones*, whom they sent for from Etruria, were however merely dancers, who probably did not attempt pantomimic movements, but endeavoured to delight their audience by a display of bodily activity. The oldest spoken plays, the *Fabulæ Atellanæ*, were borrowed by the Romans from the *Osci*, the indigenous inhabitants of Italy. They were satisfied with these *saturæ* (for so they were called, as at first they were merely improvisatory farces, without any dramatic connexion; *satura*, signifying a farrago, or mixture of every thing), till Livius Andronicus, somewhat more than five hundred years after the foundation of Rome, began the imitation of the Greeks; and the regular compositions of tragedy and the new comedy (the old it was impossible to transplant) were then, for the first time, known in Rome.

Thus the Romans owed the first idea of a play to

the Etrurians, the effusions of a sportive humour to the Oscians, and the higher class of dramatic productions to the Greeks. They displayed however more originality in the comic than in the tragic department. The Oscians, whose language soon ceased to be spoken, and of which the remains were only to be found in these farces, were a race so nearly related to the Romans, that their dialect must have been immediately understood by a Roman audience: for if this had not been the case, how could the Romans have derived any amusement from the *Atellanæ*? So much did they appropriate this species of drama to themselves, that Roman youths, of noble families, became enamoured of the amusement, and used to engage in the representation; on which account, even the players, who gained a livelihood by acting the Atellanic fables, enjoyed peculiar privileges, being exempted from the ignominy which attached to other theatrical artists, the exclusion from corporations and from military service.

The Romans had, besides, their peculiar *Mimi*. The foreign name of these small pieces would lead us to conclude that they bore a great affinity to the Greek *Mimi*; they differed however considerably in form; we know also that the manners portrayed in them had a local truth, and that the subject was not derived from Grecian compositions.

It is peculiar to Italy, that from the earliest times the people have displayed a native talent for a merry, amusing, though very rude species of farce or buffoonery, in extemporary speeches and songs,

with accompanying gestures; but this talent has seldom been coupled with true dramatic knowledge. In justification of this last assertion, we have only to notice what has been performed in the higher walks of the drama in that country, down to the very latest period. The former might be confirmed by a number of circumstances, which would lead us however too far from our object into the history of the Saturnalia and similar customs. In the wit, and the apposite ridicule on passing events, adapted to the capacity of the people, which prevail in the dialogues of Pasquino and Marforio, we even find many traces of the times of the Emperors, who were not however very much disposed to favour these liberties.

The conjecture that in these *Mimi* and *Atellanæ* we must perhaps seek for the first germ of the *commedia dell' arte*, the improvisatory farce with standing masks, is more immediately connected with our present purpose. There is a striking affinity between this and the *Atellanæ*, in the employment of different dialects to produce a ludicrous effect. But how would Harlequin and Pulcinello be astonished, were they to be told that they descended in a direct line from the buffoons of the ancient Romans, and even from the Oscians!—With what drollery would they be disposed to requite the labours of the antiquarian, who should trace back their glorious pedigree to this root! We know from the figures on the Greek vases, that a dress very much resembling theirs was used even in the grotesque masks of the old comedy: long

breeches, and a waistcoat with arms, articles of dress which the Greeks, as well as the Romans, never used except on the stage. Even in the present day *Zanni* is one of the names of Harlequin; and *Sannio* in the Latin farces was a buffoon, who, according to the accounts of ancient writers, had a shaven head, and a dress patched together of rags of all colours. The figure of Pulcinello is said to be an accurate resemblance of what has been found painted on the walls in Pompeji. If he came originally from Atella, he may still be accounted a native of his ancient country. The objection that these traditions could not have been preserved during the cessation of all theatrical amusements, for so many centuries, will be easily got over, when we recollect the freedom enjoyed during the annual carnival, and the frolicsome festivals of the middle ages.

The Greek *Mimi* were dialogues in prose, and not destined for the stage; the Roman were in verse, were represented, and often delivered extempore. The most celebrated authors in this way were Laberius and Syrus, contemporaries of Julius Cæsar. The latter, when dictator, by a courtly request, compelled Laberius, a Roman knight, to appear publicly in his *Mimi*, although the scenic employment was stigmatized with the loss of civil rights. Laberius complained of this in a prologue, which we still have, and in which the suffering of wounded honour is expressed in a noble and affecting manner. We cannot well conceive how, in this disposition of mind, he could be capable of a display of extrava-

gant buffoonery, nor how, with such a painful example of voluntary degradation before their eyes, the spectators could take any delight in it. Cæsar kept his word: he gave Laberius a considerable sum of money, and invested him anew with the knightly ring, which however could not re-instate him in the opinion of his fellow citizens. He took his revenge at the same time for the prologue and other allusions,* by bestowing the prize on Syrus, the slave, and afterward the freedman and scholar of Laberius in the mimetic art. We have still a number of sentences from the *Mimi* of Syrus, which from their internal worth and elegant conciseness of expression, are deserving of a place by the side of those of Menander. Some of them go even beyond the moral horizon of serious comedy, and exhibit something like a stoical elevation. How was the transition possible from low farce to this elevation? And how could similar maxims be possibly introduced, without such an important concatenation of human relations, as that which is exhibited in the most dignified comedy? At all events, they are calculated to give us a very favourable idea of the *Mimi*. Horace indeed speaks slighting of the literary merit of the *Mimi* of Laberius, either from the arbitrary nature of their composition, or from

* What an inward humiliation Cæsar would have felt, could he have supposed that in a few generations, Nero, his successor in absolute sovereignty, from a mere lust for self-degradation, frequently exhibited himself in a manner, which, even in a Roman of the middle rank of life, he then knew would excite a general feeling of discontent.

the negligent manner in which they were executed. However, we ought not to allow our opinion on this subject to be too much influenced by this critical poet; for, from motives which we can easily comprehend, he lays much greater stress on the careful use of the file, than on original boldness, and fulness of invention. One entire *Mimus*, which unfortunately time has not spared for us, would have thrown more light on the question, than all the confused accounts of the grammarians, and all the conjectures of modern scholars.

The regular comedy of the Romans was for the most part *palliata*, that is, it appeared in a Grecian dress, and represented Grecian manners. This is the case with the whole of the comedies of Plautus and Terence. But they had also a *comædia togata*, so called from the Roman dress which was worn in it. *Afranius* is celebrated as the principal writer in this walk. We have no remains whatever of him, and the accounts of the nature of his works are so very scanty, that we cannot even determine with certainty, whether the togatæ were original comedies of an entirely new invention, or merely Greek comedies adapted to Roman manners. The last case is the more probable, as Afranius lived in a period when the Roman genius had not yet attempted to soar on the wings of original invention; and yet we cannot well conceive the possibility of adapting Attic comedies, without the greatest violence and constraint, to local circumstances of so very different a nature. The way of living of the Romans was in general serious and grave, although

in private society they displayed a great turn for wit and joviality. The diversity of ranks among the Romans was politically marked in a very decided manner, and the wealth of private individuals was frequently not inferior to that of sovereigns : women lived much more in society, and acted a much more important part with them than among the Greeks ; and from this independence they fully participated in the overwhelming tide of corruption and external refinement by which it was accompanied. With these essential differences, an original Roman comedy would have been a remarkable phenomenon, and would have enabled us to see these conquerors of the world in an aspect altogether new. That this however was not accomplished in the *comædia togata*, the indifferent manner in which it is mentioned by the ancients will hardly leave us any reason to doubt. Quintilian has not attempted to conceal from us that the Latin literature was lamest in comedy ; these are the very words in which he expresses himself.

With respect to tragedy, we must in the first place remark, that the Grecian theatre was not introduced into Rome without considerable changes in its arrangement, that the chorus had no longer a place in the orchestra, in which the most distinguished spectators, the knights and senators, now sat, but remained on the stage itself. Hence, the same objections which we urged against the attempts to introduce the chorus in modern times, are equally applicable to the Roman theatre.—Other deviations from the Grecian plan were sanc-

tioned, which could hardly be considered as improvements. Even at the introduction of the regular drama, Livius Andronicus, a Grecian by birth, and the first tragic poet and actor of Rome, in the monodies (lyrical pieces which were sung by one person, and not by the chorus), separated the singing from the mimetic dancing, so that the latter only remained to the actor; and instead of the former, a boy stood beside the flute-player, and accompanied him with his voice. Among the Greeks in better times, the tragic singing, and the accompanying rhythmical gestures, were so simple, that one person was sufficient to do at the same time the most ample justice to both. The Romans however, it would seem, preferred separate skill to harmonious unity. Hence arose their fondness, at an after period, for pantomimes, of which the art was, in the time of Augustus, carried to the greatest perfection. From the names of the most celebrated of the performers, Pylades, Bathyllus, &c. it would appear that those who practised this mute eloquence in Rome were Greeks; and the lyrical pieces which their dancing expressed were also delivered in the Grecian language. Roscius frequently played without a mask, and in this respect probably he did not stand alone; but as far as we know, there never was any instance of it among the Greeks. The alteration in question might contribute to the more brilliant developement of his art, and the Romans, who were pleased with it, showed here also that they had a higher relish for the disproportionate and prominent talents of a

virtuoso, than for the harmonious impression of a work of art, considered as a whole.

In the tragic literature of the Romans, there are two epochs: the first that of Livius Andronicus, Nævius; Ennius, and also of Pacūvius and Attius, who both flourished somewhat later than Plautus and Terence; and the second, the refined epoch of the Augustan age. The former produced only translators and imitators of Grecian works, but it is probable that they succeeded better in tragedy than in comedy. Elevation of expression usually appears somewhat unbending in a language not sufficiently cultivated, but still it may be attained by perseverance; but to catch the negligent grace of social raillery, we must ourselves be possessed of humour and refinement. Here however, as well as in the case of Plautus and Terence, we have not a single fragment of the Greek original, to enable us to judge of the accuracy and general felicity of the copy; but a speech of considerable length, of the *Freed Prometheus* of Attius, is in no respect unworthy of Æschylus, and is also, in versification, much more polished* than the productions of the Latin comic writers generally are. This earlier

* In what syllabic metres could these tragedians translate the Grecian choral odes? Horace declares the imitation of Pindar, whose lyrical productions bear great resemblance to those of tragedy, altogether impracticable in Latin. Probably they never ventured into the labyrinths of the choral strophes, which were neither calculated for the language nor the ear of the Romans. The tragedies of Seneca never ascend higher beyond the anapest than a sapphic or choriambic verse, which, when monotonously repeated, is very disagreeable to the ear.

style was carried to perfection by Pacuvius and Attius, whose pieces kept their place on the stage, and seem to have had many admirers down to the times of Cicero, and even still later. Horace directs his jealous criticism against these, as well as all the other old poets.

It was the ambition of the contemporaries of Augustus, to measure their powers with the Greeks in a more original manner; but their labours were not in every department attended with equal success. The number of amateurs who attempted to shine in tragedy was particularly great; and works of the Emperor himself are even mentioned. Hence there is every reason for supposing that Horace wrote his epistle to the Pisos, chiefly with the view of deterring these young men from so dangerous a career; as they were, probably, infected by the universal passion, without possessing the requisite talents. One of the most renowned tragic poets of this age was the celebrated *Asinius Pollio*, a man of an impassioned disposition, as Pliny informs us, and who, in plastic works, was fond of whatever bore the same character. It was he who brought with him the well known groupe of the Farnesian Bull from Rhodes, and erected it at Rome. If his tragedies bore the same relation to those of Sophocles, which this bold, wild, but somewhat extravagant groupe does to the tranquil grandeur of Niobe, we have every reason to regret their loss. But the political importance of Pollio might easily blind his contemporaries with respect to the value of his poetical labours. *Ovid*, who tried so many depart-

ments of poetry, has also attempted tragedy, and is the author of a *Medea*. From the garrulous and common place displays of passion in his *Heroides*, we might at most expect from him, in tragedy, a caricature of Euripides. Quintilian however asserts that he proved here, for once, what he could have done, had he chosen to restrain himself instead of yielding to his natural propensity to diffuseness.

These and all the other tragic attempts of the age of Augustus have perished. We cannot estimate with any degree of certainty the magnitude of the loss which we have here suffered, but from all appearances it is not extraordinarily great.—The Grecian tragedy had at first to struggle in Rome with all the inconveniencies of a plant removed to a foreign soil; the Roman religion was in some degree related to the Greek, yet by no means so completely the same as many people suppose, but the heroic mythology of the Greeks was merely introduced into Rome by the poets, and was in no wise connected with the national recollections. The idea of an original Roman tragedy is now present to me, obscurely indeed, and in the back ground of time, and with that indistinctness which any thing must have, which never issued from the bosom of possibility into existing reality. It ought to have been altogether different in substance and form from that of the Greeks, and conceived in the old Roman character of religion and patriotism. Every thing like creative poetry can only be derived from the inward life of a people,

and from religion, the root of that life. The spirit of the Roman religion was however originally, and before the substance of it was sacrificed to foreign ornament, quite different from that of the Grecian. The latter was plastically flexible, the former sacerdotally immutable. The Roman creed, and the customs founded on it, were more serious, moral, pious, displayed more insight into nature, and had something more of magic and mysticism, than that part at least, of the Greek religion, which was not included in the mysteries. As the Greek tragedy represented the struggle of man in a state of freedom with destiny, a true Roman tragedy ought to have exhibited the subjection of human impulse to the holy and binding force of *religion*, and the visible presence of that religion in all earthly things. But this spirit had been long extinguished, when the want of poetry of a cultivated description first began to be felt by them. The Patricians, in their origin an Etrurian sacerdotal school, had become mere statesmen and warriors, who considered their hereditary priesthood in no other light than that of a political form. Their sybilline books, their vedams, were then unintelligible to them, not so much from antiquity of character, as because they no longer possessed the higher knowledge which was the key to that sanctuary. What the Latin heroic tales might have become under an earlier developement, as well as their peculiar colouring, we may still see, from some traces in Virgil, Propertius, and Ovid, who then however handled them as matters of antiquity.

Moreover, although the Romans were at length desirous of becoming thorough Hellenists, they were deficient in that milder humanity, of which we may observe traces in Grecian history, poetry, and art, even in the time of Homer. From the most austere virtue, which, like Curtius, sacrificed every personal inclination to love of country, they proceeded, with the most fearful rapidity, to a state of corruption from avarice and luxury, equally without example. In their character they always betrayed that their first founder was not suckled at the breast of a woman, but of a raging wolf. They were the tragedians of the history of the world, who exhibited many a deep tragedy of kings led in chains and pining in dungeons; they were the iron necessity of other nations; universal destroyers for the sake of rearing at last, from the ruins, the mausoleum of their own dignity and freedom, in the midst of an obsequious world, reduced to one dull uniformity. It was not given to them to excite emotion by the mitigated accents of mental suffering, and to touch with a delicate hand every note of the scale of feeling. They naturally sought also in tragedy, by overleaping all intervening gradations, to reach at once the extreme, both in the stoicism of heroism, and in the monstrous fury of criminal desires. Nothing of their ancient greatness had remained to them but the contempt of pain and death, when after an extravagant enjoyment of life they were at last called upon to submit to these evils. They then impressed this seal

of their former grandeur on their tragic heroes, with a self-satisfied and ostentatious profusion.

Finally, in the age of polished literature, among a people fond, even to a degree of madness, of shows and spectacles, the dramatic poets were still in want of a poetical public. In the triumphal processions, the fights of gladiators and of wild beasts, all the splendour of the world, all the wonders of every clime, were brought before the eye of the spectator, who was glutted with scenes of the most violent and bloody description. What effect could the more refined gradations of tragic pathos produce on nerves so steeled? It was the ambition of the powerful among them to exhibit in one day to the people, on stages erected for the purpose, and immediately afterwards destroyed, the immense plunder which they derived from foreign or civil war. The relation which Pliny gives of the architectural decoration of the stage erected by Scaurus, borders on the incredible. When magnificence could be carried no farther, they endeavoured to surprise by the novelty of mechanical inventions.—In this way, a Roman, at the burial solemnity of his father, caused two theatres to be constructed in honour of him, resting with their backs on each other, and made to move in such a manner on a single hinge, that at the end of the play, they were wheeled round with all the spectators within them, and formed together into one circus, in which combats of gladiators were exhibited. In the pleasure of the eyes that of the ears was altogether lost ; rope

dancers and white elephants were preferred to every dramatic entertainment; the embroidered purple robes of the actor were applauded, as we are told by Horace, and so little attentive and quiet was the great body of the spectators, that he compares their noise to that of the roaring of the ocean, or of a mountain forest in a storm.

We have only one sample of the tragical talent of the Romans remaining, from which however it would be unjust to draw a conclusion with respect to the productions of better times; I allude to the ten tragedies which go by the name of *Seneca*. Their claim to this title appears very doubtful to me: perhaps it is founded merely on the circumstance of *Seneca* appearing in *Octavia*, one of these plays; but this would rather lead one to draw a different conclusion. The opinions of the learned are very much divided on the subject; some ascribe them partly to Seneca the philosopher, and partly to his father the rhetorician; others ascribe them to a Seneca, a tragedian, a different person from both. Hence it is generally allowed that the different pieces are neither from the same hand, nor even of the same age. For the honour of the Roman taste we might be inclined to consider them the productions of a very late period of antiquity: but Quinctilian quotes a verse from the *Medea* of Seneca, which is to be found in the play of that name in the collection in question, and therefore the authenticity of this piece cannot be doubted, though its merits do not seem to be in any way pre-emi-

nent above the others.* We find also in Lucan a contemporary of Nero, a similar display of bombast, in which every thing great is distorted to nonsense. The state of violence and constraint in which Rome was kept under a series of blood-thirsty tyrants, had also given an unnatural character to eloquence and poetry. The same thing has been observed in similar periods of modern history. Under the wise and mild government of a Vespasian and a Titus, and of a Trajan more especially, the Romans returned to a purer taste. But whatever period may have given birth to the tragedies of Seneca, they are beyond description bombastical and frigid, unnatural in character and action, revolting from their violation of every propriety, and so destitute of every thing like theatrical effect, that I am inclined to believe they were never destined to leave the rhetorical schools for the stage. These productions have nothing in common with the old tragedies, those sublime creations of the poetical genius of the Greeks, but the name, the outward form, and the mythological materials; and yet they seem to have been composed with the obvious intention of excelling them; but they bear

* The author of this *Medea* makes the heroine strangle her children before the eyes of the people, notwithstanding the admonition of Horace, who probably had an example of the Roman theatre before his eyes; for a Greek would hardly have committed this error. The Roman tragedians must have had particular relish for seeking novelty and effect in such horrible exhibitions.

the same relation to the Grecian works, which a hollow hyperbole does to the most fervent truth. Every tragical common-place is spun out to the very last; all is phrase; and even the most common remark is delivered in stilted language. The most complete poverty of sentiment is dressed out with wit and acuteness. There is even a display of fancy in them, or at least a phantom of it; for they contain an example of the misapplication of every mental faculty. The authors have found out the secret of being diffuse, even to wearisomeness, and at the same time so epigrammatically laconic, as to be often obscure and unintelligible. Their characters are neither ideal nor actual beings, but gigantic puppets, who are at one time put in motion by the string of an unnatural heroism, and at another by that of a passion equally unnatural, which no guilt nor enormity can appal.

In a history of the dramatic art I should have altogether overlooked the tragedies of Seneca, if, from a blind prejudice for every thing which has come down to us from antiquity, they had not been often imitated in modern times. They were more early and more generally known than the Greek tragedies. Not merely learned men, without a feeling for art, have judged favourably of them, nay preferred them to the Grecian tragedies, but even poets have accounted them deserving of their study and imitation. The influence of Seneca on Corneille's idea of tragedy cannot be mistaken; Racine too, in his *Phædra*, has condescended to borrow a good deal from him, and among other

things, nearly the whole scene of the declaration of love, of all which we have an enumeration in Brumoy.

We now leave the productions of classical antiquity, and proceed to the dramatic literature of the moderns. Respecting the order most convenient for the subject of which we are about to treat, it may be doubtful whether we ought to consider, *seriatim*, what each nation has accomplished, or to proceed from one to another, according to the manner in which their influences have been reciprocally felt and crossed by each other. The productions of the Italian theatre, for instance, after its first revival, had an influence on the French at its commencement, but the influence of the latter was again felt by the Italian stage in a considerable degree. The French, before their stage attained its full maturity, borrowed still more from the Spaniards than from the Italians; in later times, Voltaire attempted to enlarge their theatrical circle, by an imitation of the English, but this was not productive of any great effect, from their ideas of imitation of the ancients, and from their taste in art, according to which every thing had already been immutably fixed. The English and Spanish stages are nearly independent of all the rest, and also of one another; they have had a great influence on the theatres of other countries, but felt very little in return. But to avoid perplexity and confusion, it seems more adviseable to separate the different literatures from each other, noticing at the same time the effects produced by foreign influence.—

This is the more necessary, as in some of the modern nations the principle of imitation of the ancients has prevailed without limitation; and in others, the romantic spirit, or at least an originality altogether independent of classical models: the former is the case with the Italians and French, and the latter with the English and Spaniards.

I have already, in passing, alluded to the manner in which the then degenerate plays of the Greeks and Romans were abolished, by the introduction of Christianity, before even an end was put to every thing like art, by the eruptions of the northern conquerors. After the long sleep of the dramatic and theatrical spirit in the middle ages, which began to awake again in mysteries and moralities, independent of classical models, the first endeavour to imitate the ancients in their theatre, as well as in other arts and departments of poetry, was made by the Italians. The *Sophonisba* of Trissino, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, is generally named as the first regular tragedy. I cannot boast of having ever read this literary rarity, but I know the author, on other subjects, to be a spiritless pedant; and as even the learned, who are the most earnest in their imitation of the ancients, declare it a dull work of diligence, without any poetical spirit, we may, without any farther examination, safely acquiesce in this decision. It is singular that, while all the ancient forms, even to the chorus, are scrupulously retained, the province of mythology is changed for that of the Roman History.

The pastoral dramas of *Tasso* and *Guarini*, which

appeared towards the middle of the sixteenth century, and in which the subject, though for the most part not tragical, is however noble, and even ideal, may be considered to form an epoch in poetry.— They are furnished with choruses of the most distinguished beauty, which float, no doubt, like lyrical voices in the air, and do not appear in person, and are still less introduced as constant witnesses of the transactions, according to rules of probability. These compositions were certainly destined for the theatre; they were represented with great pomp, and we may presume in a noble taste, at Ferrara and Turin. But even this gives us an idea of the infancy of the theatre at that time: although there is a general plot and catastrophe, yet the action stands still in single scenes, and leads us to conclude that the spectators were but little accustomed to theatrical amusements, and consequently not difficult to please, and that they patiently waited the developement of beautiful poetry without dramatic progress. The *Pastor fido* in particular, is an inimitable production: original and yet classical; romantic in the spirit of the love which it represents; in its form, distinguished by the grand and simple stamp of classical antiquity; with the sweet triflings of poetry, full of the high and chaste beauty of feeling. No poet has succeeded so well in combining the peculiarities of the modern and antique. He displays a profound feeling of the essence of ancient tragedy; for the idea of fate animates the subject of his piece, and the principal characters may be said to be ideal: he has also introduced

caricatures, and on that account called the composition a tragi-comedy; but they are only caricatures from their sentiments, and not from the vulgarity of their manners; in the same manner as, in ancient tragedy, even the subordinate persons, slaves, or messengers, are invested with a portion of the general dignity.

This production is of the utmost importance in the history of poetry in general; but it had no effect on dramatic poetry, and the thing could hardly be otherwise.

I return now to what may properly be called, the tragedy of the Italians. After Sophonisba, and a few pieces of the same period, which Calsabigi calls the first tragic lisplings of Italy, a number of works of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries are cited; but there is nothing among them which has acquired any particular reputation, or which at any rate has preserved it. Although all these writers laboured, as they thought, according to the rules of Aristotle, we have the following picture of their tragical abortions from Calsabigi, a critic altogether devoted to the French system: "Distorted, complicated, improbable plots, misconception of scenic regulations, useless personages, double actions, inconsistency of character, gigantic or childish thoughts, feeble verses, affected phrases, the total absence of harmonious and natural poetry; all this decked out with ill-timed descriptions and similes, or idle philosophical and political disquisitions; in every scene some silly amour, with all the trite insipidity of common-place gallantry; of

tragic strength, of the conflict of passions, of overpowering theatrical catastrophes, not the smallest trace." We cannot prevail on ourselves to rummage through the whole of the lumber of forgotten literature, and we shall therefore immediately proceed to the consideration of the *Merope* of Maffei, which appeared in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its success in Italy was great on its first publication; and in other countries it obtained an uncommon degree of reputation from the competition of Voltaire. The object of both was to restore in some measure a lost piece of Euripides, highly praised by the ancients, from the account given of its contents by Hyginus. Voltaire, under the guise of eulogy, has criticised the *Merope* of Maffei, like a rival; and there is a lengthened criticism on it in the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing, equally ingenious and impartial. He pronounces it, notwithstanding its purity and simplicity of taste, as the work of a learned antiquary, rather than of a mind naturally adapted for, and practised in the dramatic art. We must attribute therefore the great reputation of this work to the previous state of the drama in Italy.

After Maffei came *Metastasio* and *Alfieri*; the first before the middle, and the other in the latter part of the eighteenth century. I here include the musical dramas of Metastasio, because their general aim is to produce a serious and pathetic effect, because they lay claim to ideality of conception, and because in their external form there is in part an observance of what is considered as belonging to regular tragedy. Both poets, although totally dif-

ferent in their aim, were however influenced in common by the productions of the French stage. It is true they have both declared themselves too decidedly against this school to be considered as properly belonging to it; they have assured us that they purposely avoided reading the French models, for the sake of preserving their own originality. But this very precaution appears somewhat suspicious: whoever feels himself perfectly secure in his own independence may without any hesitation study the works of his predecessors; he will derive from them an improvement in art, and yet be enabled to stamp his peculiar character on his own productions. If it is really true that these poets never in reality perused the French tragedies, or only after the completion of their works, some imperceptible influence must have diffused itself throughout the atmosphere, which determined them without their own consciousness. This is very conceivable from the great reputation which, since the time of Louis XIV. the French tragedies have not only enjoyed with the learned, but also with the fashionable world throughout all Europe; from the new modelling of several foreign theatres according to the French cut; from the prevailing tone of criticism, in which negative correctness was every thing, a tone which France gave to the literature of other countries. The affinity is in both undeniable, but more striking in Alfieri, from the intermixture of the musical element in Metastasio. I find it in the total absence of the romantic spirit; in a certain fanciless insipidity of composition; in the manner

of handling mythological and historical materials, which is neither properly mythological nor historical ; lastly, in the aim to produce a tragic purity, which degenerates into monotony. The unities of place and time have been uniformly observed by Alfieri ; the latter could only be observed by Metastasio, as a change of scene was required of the opera poet. Alfieri affords in general no food for the eyes. In his plots he aimed at the antique simplicity, while Metastasio in his rich intrigues followed Spanish models, and borrowed, in particular, a great deal from Calderon.* Yet the harmonious ideality of the ancients was as foreign to the one, as the charm of the romantic poets, arising from the indissoluble mixture of elements apparently incongruous, was to the other.

Even before Metastasio, *Apostolo Zeno* had purified, as it is called, the opera, a phrase which, in the sense of modern critics, often means the depriving a thing of substance and vigour. He formed it on tragedy, and the French tragedy more especially ; and a too faithful, or perhaps too slavish approximation to this model, is the very cause why he left so little room for musical developement, on which account his pieces were immediately driven by his more expert successor from the stage of the opera. It is in general a false direction in art, to attempt to introduce into one species, with evident disadvantages and at the expence of its own peculiar

* This is expressly asserted by the learned Spaniard Arteaga, in his Italian work on the History of the Opera.

beauties, what can be accomplished more perfectly in another. This originates in a chilling idea of regularity, established at once for all subjects, instead of observing the spirit of each, and ascertaining the peculiar laws by which it ought to be regulated.

Metastasio threw Zeno into the shade, as, with the same object in view, he displayed a greater flexibility in accommodating himself to the wants of the musician. The merits which have gained him the reputation of a classic among the Italians of the present day, and which have made him in some degree for them what Racine is for the French, are, the most perfect purity, clearness, elegance, and sweetness of language in general, and in particular, the softest melody and the greatest loveliness in the songs. Perhaps no poet ever possessed in a greater degree the talent of comprehending in a few lines the essential features of a pathetic situation; the songs with which the characters make their exit, are almost always the purest musical extract of their state of mind which can possibly be given. But we must own at the same time, that his pictures of passion are all general: his pathos is purified, not only from all characteristical, but from all contemplative substance; and the poetic conception, being of no great weight, proceeds unremittingly with a light and easy motion, the care of a richer developement being left to the musician. Metastasio is musical throughout; but, to follow up the simile, we may observe that of the poetical music, he possesses only the part of melody, with-

out any knowledge of harmony, or the mysterious effects of counterpoint. Or to express myself in a different language, he is musical, but in no respect picturesque. His melodies are light and pleasant, but they are repeated with small variation; when we have read a few of his pieces we are acquainted with all of them, and the composition is always as a whole without signification. His heroes are gallant like those of Corneille, his heroines tender like those of Racine; but this has been too sharply censured by many without a due consideration of the wants of the opera. It appears to me that he is only censurable for the selection of materials, the severe seriousness of which were incapable of being mixed up with such triflings, without a striking incongruity. Had Metastasio not laid hold of great historical names, had he borrowed his objects more frequently from mythology, or from compositions of a still more fanciful nature, had he always made the same happy choice which he has exhibited in his Achilles in Scyros, where, from the nature of the subject, the heroic is interwoven with the idyllic, we might then have pardoned him for universally painting all his characters in love. We should then willingly have permitted him to indulge in fanciful allusions of a still bolder description, if we ourselves have an understanding of what we ought to expect from an opera. By his tragical pretensions he has injured himself: his powers were not suited to the task, and the seductive flattery at which he aimed was incapable of union with overpowering energy. I have heard a celebrated Italian poet assert that

his countrymen were moved to tears by Metastasio. We can only get over such a national evidence as this, by accounting for the circumstance as a symptom of the moral constitution of the Italians. It appears to me undeniable, that a certain melting effeminacy in feeling and expression rendered Metastasio the delight of his contemporaries. He has lines which, from their dignity and vigorous conciseness, are perfectly suited to tragedy; and yet we perceive a certain something in them, which seems to show that they were destined for the flexible throat of a soprano singer.

The astonishing fortune of Metastasio throughout all Europe, and especially at courts, must also in a great measure be attributed to his being a court poet, not merely by profession, but also by the manner in which he composed, which was exactly that of the tragedians of the age of Louis XIV.—Superficial splendour without depth; prosaic sentiments and thoughts decked out with a choice poetical language; a courtly moderation in every thing, in the display of passion, and in the exhibition of misfortune and crime; observation of the proprieties and apparent morality, for in these dramas voluptuousness is merely breathed, but never named, and the heart is always in every mouth; it was impossible that all these properties should not recommend such tragical miniatures to the world of fashion. The pomp of noble sentiments is not spared, but they are closely followed by traits of baseness, perpetrated with a levity peculiar to Metastasio. It not unfrequently happens that an

injured fair one dismisses her lover with the intention of stabbing him behind. In almost all the pieces there appears a crafty knave who plays the traitor, for whom there is always in readiness a display of royal magnanimity, to make all matters even at the end. This levity with which base falsehood is taken into favour, as if it were merely an amiable weakness, would have appeared extremely disgusting, if his tragical incidents had taken a serious turn. But the poisoned cup is always at the seasonable instant dashed from the lips; the daggers are either dropped, or they are forced from the hands of those who intend to use them, before the deadly blow can be struck; the utmost injury received is a slight scratch; and there is always some subterranean exit, affording the means of flight from the dungeon and from death. The dread of the ridiculous, that conscience of all poets who write for the world of fashion, is very visible in his avoiding all bold measures not sanctioned by custom, in his avoiding every thing supernatural, because a public of this description carries with it no belief in wonders, even to the fantastic stage of the opera. Yet this dread has not always served as a sure guide to Metastasio: besides an extravagant use of *aside*, which often appears ludicrous, the subordinate loves assume frequently the appearance of being intended as a parody of the others. Here the Abbé, who was thoroughly acquainted with the various gradations of cicisbeism, its pains and its pleasures, at once betrays himself. To the favoured lover there is generally opposed another, whose pre-

sence is felt as an incumbrance, and who continues to urge his suit without return, the *soffione* among the *cicisbei*; the former loves in all stillness, and frequently finds no opportunity till the end of the piece, of offering his well turned declaration of love: we might call him the *patito*. This unintermitting love-chase is not confined to the male parts, but extended also to the female, that in every thing the most brilliant contrasts may be exhibited.

A few only of the operas of Metastasio still keep possession of the stage, as the change of taste in music demands a different arrangement of the text. Metastasio seldom has choruses, and his airs are almost always for a single voice: with these the scenes are uniformly terminated, and the singer never fails to make his exit with them. It appears as if, proud of having exhibited this highest triumph of his feeling, he left the spectators to their astonishment, whenever the chirping of the passions in the recitatives rose in the air, to something like the more full tones of the nightingale. In an opera we now require more frequent duos and trios, and a crashing finale. In fact, the most difficult problem for the opera poet is the mixing the complicated voices of conflicting passions in one common harmony, without injuring their essence: a problem however which is generally solved by both poet and musical composer in a very arbitrary manner.

Alfieri, a bold and proud man, disdained to please by such meretricious means as those of which Metastasio had availed himself: he was highly incensed at the emasculated and degraded state of his

countrymen, and the degeneracy of his contemporaries in general. This rage stimulated him to the exhibition of a manly strength of mind, of stoical principles, and free opinions, and on the other hand to depict all the horrors and enormities of despotism. The enthusiasm was political and moral in a much greater degree than it was poetical, and we must praise his tragedies as the actions of the man rather than as the works of the poet.—From his great disinclination to pursue the same path with Metastasio, he naturally fell into the opposite extreme: I should be disposed to call him a Metastasio reversed. If the muse of the latter is a love-sick nymph, the muse of Alfieri is an Amazon. He gave her a Spartan education, he aimed at being the Cato of the theatre; but he forgot that, although the tragic poet may himself be a stoic, tragic poetry itself must never be stoical, if it would move and agitate us. His language is so destitute of imagery, that his characters seem altogether deprived of fancy; it is broken and harsh: he wished to steel it anew, and it thereby not only lost its splendour, but became brittle and inflexible. He is not only not musical, but positively too anti-musical; he tortures our feelings by the harshest dissonance, without any softening or solution.—Tragedy, from its elevation of sentiment, ought in in some degree to disentangle our minds from the sensual power of the body; but to do this with effect, it must not attempt to strip this dangerous gift of heaven of its charms: it must rather show us the highest majesty of our existence surrounded by

abysses. When we read the tragedies of Alfieri, the world appears in general in an obscure and repulsive aspect to us. A style of composition in which the ordinary course of human affairs is exhibited as dark and gloomy, and the only variety is the horror of the extraordinary catastrophes, resembles a climate in which the perpetual fogs of a northern winter are only illumined by the fiery storms of the torid zone. We must expect as little characteristical depth and refinement in Alfieri as in Metastasio : he exhibits only the opposite partial view of human nature. His characters are in the same manner cast according to naked and general ideas, and he frequently paints the extremes of black and white beside one another, without any intervening gradation. His knaves, for the most part, exhibit all their deformity in their exterior ; this might pass, although such a picture will hardly enable us to recognise them in real life ; but his virtuous persons are not amiable, and this is a matter of much more serious importance. He studiously stripped himself of all the seductive graces, and even of all subordinate charms and ornaments (as if they had not been sufficiently denied by nature to this caustic genius), with the view of promoting his moral aim, as he thought, without reflecting that the poet has no other means of leading the minds of men than the fascinations of his art.

From the tragedy of the Greeks, with which he first became acquainted towards the end of his career, he was separated by a wide chasm ; and I cannot consider his pieces as an improvement on

the French tragedy. Their structure is more simple, the dialogue in some cases less conventional; the dismissal of confidants has been highly extolled as a difficulty overcome by him, and an improvement of the French system; he had the same aversion to chamberlains and court ladies in poetry as in real life. But his pieces bear no comparison with the better French tragedies in pleasing and brilliant eloquence; they also display much less skill in the plot, in the gradations, preparations, and transitions. Compare, for instance, the *Britannicus* of Racine with the *Octavia* of Alfieri. Both drew their materials from Tacitus; but which of them displayed the most perfect understanding of this profound master of the human heart? Racine appears here as a man who was thoroughly acquainted with all the corruptions of a court, and who saw ancient Rome under the Emperors in this glass of observation. On the other hand, if Alfieri did not expressly assure us that his *Octavia* was a daughter of Tacitus, we might be inclined to believe that she was modelled on that of the pretended Seneca. The colours with which he paints tyrants are those of the school rhetoricians. In his blustering and raging Nero, can we recognise the man who seemed formed by nature, as Tacitus says, "to conceal his hatred under caresses?"—the cowardly Sybarite, fantastically vain till the very last moment of his existence, cruel at first from fear, and afterwards from the extravagance of desire?

If Alfieri has been here unfaithful to Tacitus, he has proved himself not less superficial in his attempt

to translate Macchiavel into the language of poetry, in the *Conspiracy of the Pazzi*. In this and other pieces from modern history, *Philip* and *Don Garcia*, he has by no means hit the spirit and tone of modern times, nor even of his own nation: his ideas of the tragic style were at variance with every thing like a local and determinate costume. It is astonishing to see how the subjects borrowed from the tragic cycles of the Greeks, as the *Orestiad*, for instance, lose all their heroic magnificence in his hands, and assume a modern and almost vulgar air. He has succeeded best in painting the public life of the Roman republic; and it is a great merit in *Virginia* that the action takes place in the forum, and in part before the eyes of the people. On other occasions the scene chosen by him is for the most part so invisible and indeterminate in its observed unity of place, that one would imagine it was some out of the way corner, where nobody came but persons involved in transactions of an unpleasant nature. The stripping his kings and heroes altogether of their external pomp, produces the impression that the world is actually depopulated around them. This stage solitude is very striking in *Saul*, the scene of which is laid between two armies on the point of coming to a decisive battle, though this piece is in other respects highly superior to the rest, from a certain oriental splendour, and from the lyrical sublimity in which the troubled mind of Saul is expressed. *Myrrha* is too bold an attempt to give a colour of propriety to a subject equally revolting to the senses and the feelings.

The Spaniard Arteaga has criticised this tragedy and that of Philip with great severity, but with great truth.

I reserve for the review of the present condition of the Italian theatre my remarks on what has been produced since the time of Alfieri, and return to give a short sketch of the history of comedy.

In this department the Italians were not at first sufficiently attentive in their imitation of the ancients to the difference of times and manners, and translations of Plautus and Terence were represented on the oldest theatres; but they soon fell into the most singular extravagancies. We have comedies of *Ariosto* and *Macchiavel*; of the former in rimeless verse, *versi sdrucchioli*, and even one in prose of the latter. Such men could produce nothing which would not bear traces of their genius. But Ariosto in the cut of his pieces kept too close to the invention of the ancients, and exhibited therefore no living picture of the manners of his times. In Macchiavel this is only the case in his *Clizia*, an imitation of Plautus; the *Mandragola*, and another comedy without a name, are sufficiently Florentine; but unfortunately they are not of a very edifying description. A simple husband who is deceived, and a hypocritical and pandering monk, play the principal parts. Inventions in the style of the free and merry tales of Boccaccio are boldly and bluntly conveyed in the form of dialogue, but with respect to theatrical effect they do not display any great art. As *Mimi*, that is, as pictures of the language of ordinary life with all its idiotisms, these

productions are much to be commended. They resemble the Latin comic poets in their indecency. This was indeed the general tone. The comedies of *Pietro Aretino* are merely remarkable for their immodesty. It seems as if these writers, deeming the spirit of a more refined love inconsistent with the essence of comedy, had exhausted the very lees of the sensual amours of the Greek comedy.

At an earlier period, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, there was one unsuccessful attempt to dramatise a serious novel, as a middle species between comedy and tragedy, and to adorn it with poetical splendour: the *Virginia* of *Accolti*. I have never had an opportunity of reading it, but the unfavourable report of a literary man disposes me to think favourably of it.* According to his description, it must resemble the older pieces of the Spanish stage before it was yet sufficiently formed; and in common with them the stanza measure is used in it. The attempts at romantic drama have always failed in Italy, whereas in Spain again all endeavours to model the theatre according to the

* *Bouterwek's Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit.*—*Erster Band*, s. 334, &c.—M. Bouterwek has made himself ridiculous by saying: "A poet with any knowledge of dramatic interest would hardly have attempted to convert this story into an ordinary comedy." Did he know or reflect that the story, as related by him, agrees accurately in every circumstance with the plot of Shakspeare's *All's Well that ends Well*? That *Accolti* in this comedy did not trouble himself with the unities of time and place (it was indeed impossible for him to observe them) draws down on him the vengeance of M. Bouterwek. Alas for the fate of poor Shakspeare in this History of Poetry!

rules of the ancients, and latterly of the French, have uniformly been abortive, from the difference of national taste.

We have a comedy from *Tasso*, *Gli Intrichi d'Amore*, which ought rather to be called a lengthened romance in the form of dialogue. So many and such wonderful events are crowded together within the narrow limit of five acts, that one incident treads closely upon the heels of another without the least development, which gives an unsupportable hardness to the whole. Criminal designs are portrayed with indifference, and the drollery is made to consist in the manner in which an event anticipates its consequences. We cannot here recognise the Tasso whose tender feelings for love, chivalry, and honour are pronounced so delightfully in his *Jerusalem Delivered*, on which account it has been doubted if this work ought really to be attributed to him. The richness of invention, if we may give this name to a rude accumulation of incidents, is so great, that the attention is tortured in the most painful manner, in endeavouring to avoid confounding one thing with another.

We have a multitude of Italian comedies written about this period, and planned in the same manner, only with less order and connexion, the chief aim being to delight by means of indecency. A parasite and procuress are standing characters in all of them. Among the comic poets of this class, *Giambatista Porta* deserves to be distinguished. His plots are, it is true, like those of the rest, imitations of *Plautus*

and Terence, or dramatised tales ; but a tender feeling is breathed throughout the love-dialogues, which he seems to have laboured with peculiar fondness, a feeling which forces its way through the rudeness of Italian comedy, and which is so much at variance with the nature of the materials.

In the seventeenth century, when the Spanish theatre flourished in all its glory, the Italians seem to have borrowed frequently from it ; but they must have disfigured the subjects which they so took from not having a due understanding of them. The neglect of the regular stage was increased by the passion for the opera, in which every thing else was swallowed up, and by the invincible taste of the body of the people for improvisatory farces with standing masks. These last are not to be despised : they fix, as it were, many central points of the national character, in the comic exhibition of peculiarities of speech, dress, &c. Their recurrence does not by any means exclude the greatest diversity in the plot of the pieces, for it is as in chess, with a small number of men, every person having his determinate course, an endless number of combinations is possible. But extemporaneous playing easily degenerates into insipidity ; this may have been the case in Italy, notwithstanding the Italians possess a great fund of drollery and fantastic wit, and a peculiar felicity in farcical gesticulation.

About the middle of the last century, *Goldoni* appeared as a reformer of the Italian comedy, and his success was so great, that he remained almost exclusively in possession of the comic stage. He is

certainly not deficient in theatrical skill; but, as the event has proved, his substance, his depth of character, his novelty and richness of invention, are not such as to ensure a durable reputation. His pictures of manners are true, but not sufficiently elevated above the range of every-day life; he has exhausted the surface of life; and as there is little progression in his dramas, and every thing turns usually on the same point, this adds to the impression of shallowness and ennui. He would willingly have abolished masks altogether, but he could hardly have afforded a sufficient compensation from his own means; he retained only a few of them, as Harlequin, Brighella, and Pantaloon, and limited their parts. He fell into a great uniformity of character, which indeed he partly confesses from his repetition of names: for instance, his Beatrice and Rosaura are always the one a lively, and the other a feeling young woman, and for any farther distinction it is not to be found in him.

The excessive admiration of Goldoni, and the injury sustained by the masked comedy, for which the company of Sacchi in Venice possessed the highest talents, gave rise to the dramas of *Gozzi*. They are fairy tales in a dramatic form, in which however, along with the wonderful, versified, and serious part, he introduced the whole of the masks, and allowed them the most unrestrained development. They are pieces for effect, if ever there were such pieces, of great boldness and plot, still more fantastic than romantic, although he was the first of the comic poets of Italy who showed any feeling

for honour and love. The execution is by no means careful or skilful, but dashed off in the manner of a sketch. With all his whimsical boldness he is still extremely familiar; the principal motives are detailed with the most unambiguous perspicuity, all the touches are coarse and vigorous: he says, he knows well that his countrymen are fond of the most robust situations. After his imagination had been in some degree wearied with oriental tales, he applied himself to the re-modelling of Spanish plays, particularly those of Calderon; but here he is deserving of much less praise. The ethereal and delicately shaded poetry of the Spaniard is uniformly vulgarised by him, and exhibited in glaring colours; the weight of his masks draws the ærial texture to the ground, as the humorous introduction of the *gracioso* in the Spanish is of a much more refined character. This extravagant caricature of the masked parts served as an admirable contrast to the wildly wonderful nature of the fairy tale. The character of the pieces was, in the serious part, as well as in the accompanying drollery, equally removed from natural truth. In this manner Gozzi fell almost accidentally on a fund of the deepest import, of which he was not himself perhaps aware: his prosaical, and for the most part improvisatory, masks; formed altogether of themselves the irony of the poetical part. What I mean by irony, I shall explain more fully when I come to the justification of the mixture of the tragic and comic in the romantic drama of Shakspeare and Calderon. I shall only here observe, that it is a sort of con-

fession interwoven into the subject itself, and expressed with more or less distinctness, of its overcharged partiality in matters of fancy and feeling, by means of which the equilibrium is again restored. The Italians were not however aware of this, and Gozzi has not found any followers to carry his rude sketches to a higher degree of perfection. Instead of combining like him, only in a more refined manner, the charms of wonderful poetry with exhilarating mirth; instead of comparing Gozzi, notwithstanding the great disparity, with the foreign masters of the romantic drama, and from the unconscious affinity between them in spirit and plan, drawing the conclusion that the common principle was founded in nature; the Italians have contented themselves with considering the pieces of Gozzi as the wild offspring of an extravagant imagination, and with banishing them from the stage. The comedy with masks is held in contempt by the classes who suppose themselves polished, as if they were too wise for this exhibition, and it is abandoned by them to the common people at the Sunday representations in the theatres and in puppet-shows. Although this contempt must have an injurious influence on masks, as no actor of talents devotes himself to them, so that they are altogether destitute of examples of the spirited and witty manner in which they were formerly filled, this species is still however the only one in which we find original and truly theatrical entertainment in Italy.*

* A few years ago, I saw in Milan an excellent *Truffaldin* or

In tragedy they generally imitate Alfieri, who, although it is the prevailing fashion to admire him, expresses his thoughts in too strong and manly a manner, to be supportable on the stage. They have produced single pieces of merit, but the principles of tragic art which Alfieri followed are altogether false, and in the bawling and heartless declamation of their actors, this tragic poetry, stripped with stoical severity of all the charms of grouping, of musical harmony, and of every thing like tender feeling, is represented with the most deadening uniformity and monotony.*

One of their living poets, *Giovanni Pindemonti*, has endeavoured to introduce greater extent, variety, and nature into his historical plays, but he has been severely handled by their critics for descending from

Harlequin, and here and there in obscure theatres, and even in puppet-shows, admirable representations of the old traditional jokes of the country.

* As all the rich rewards are reserved for the singers, it is natural that their players, who are only introduced as a sort of fill up between singing and dancing, should, for the most part, not even possess the A, B, C, of their art, a pure pronunciation, and a cultivated memory. They have no idea that their parts ought to be got by heart, and hence we hear every piece almost twice over in an Italian theatre; the prompter speaks as loud as a good player elsewhere, and in order to be distinguished from him they bawl most insufferably. It is exceedingly amusing to see the prompter, when from the general forgetfulness a scene threatens to fall into confusion, labouring away, and stretching out his head from his hole like a serpent, hurrying through the dialogue before the different speakers, and entering into their parts. Of all the actors in the world, I conceive those of Paris to have their parts best by heart; in this, as well as in the knowledge of versification, the Germans are far inferior to them.

the height of the cothurnus to attain a truth of circumstance, without which it is impossible for this species of drama to exist; perhaps also for deviating from the strict observation of the traditional rules, so blindly adored by them. If the Italian verse is in fact so fastidious as not to bear many historical peculiarities, modern names and titles for instance, let them write partly in prose, and call the production not a tragedy, but an historical drama. It seems in general to be assumed as an undoubted principle, that the *verso sciolto* of eleven syllables without rhyme is the only one fit for the drama, but this does not seem to me to be by any means proved. This verse, in variety and metrical signification, is greatly inferior to the English and German rhymeless iambic, from its uniform feminine termination, and from there being merely an accentuation in Italian, without any syllabic measure; in the frequent transition of the sense from verse to verse, according to every possible division, the lines flow into one another without its being possible for the ear to separate them. Alfieri imagined that he had found out the genuine dramatic manner of treating this verse corresponding to his dialogue, which consists of nothing but detached periods, or rather of propositions entirely unperiodical and abruptly terminated. It is possible that he carried with him into his works a personal peculiarity, for he was exceedingly laconic; he was also, as he himself relates, determined by the example of Seneca: but what a different lesson he would have learned from the Greeks!

We do not, it is true, connect our language so much in conversation as in an oratorical harangue, but the opposite extreme is equally unnatural. We observe a certain continuity in our common discourse, we give a developement to arguments and objections, and in an instant we are animated by passion to a fulness of expression, to a flow of eloquence, and even to lyrical sublimity. The ideal dialogue of tragedy may therefore find in actual conversation all the various tones and turns of poetry, with the exception of epic repose. I should therefore conceive the manner of Metastasio, and of Tasso, and Guarini before him, in their pastoral dramas, to be much more pleasant and suitable than the monotonous verse of eleven syllables: they intermix verses of seven syllables, and occasionally, after a number of blank lines, introduce a couple of rhymes, and even insert a rhyme in the middle of a verse. From this the transition to more measured strophes, either in *ottave rime*, or in lyrical metres, would be easy. Rhyme, and the connexion which it occasions, have nothing in them inconsistent with the essence of dramatic dialogue, and the rejection of a change of measure in the drama rests merely on a chilling idea of regularity.

No suitable versification has yet been invented in Italy for comedy. The *verso sciolto*, as is well known, does not answer; it is not sufficiently familiar. The verse of twelve syllables, with a *sdrucchiolo* termination selected by Ariosto, is much better, resembling the trimeter of the ancients, but is still somewhat monotonous. It has been however but

little cultivated. The Martellian verse, a bad imitation of the Alexandrine, is a downright torture to the ear. Chiari, and occasionally Goldoni, at last used it, and Gozzi by way of derision. It still remains therefore to the prejudice of a more elegant style in prose.

Of new comedies the Italians have none; if they have, the pictures of manners are still more dull and superficial than those of Goldoni, without drollery, without invention, and, from their every-day common-place, downrightly disgusting. But they have acquired a just relish for the sentimental drama and familiar tragedy; they play with great fondness the popular German pieces of this description, and even produce the most detestable imitations of them. From being accustomed to operas and ballets, their favourite dramatic amusements, in which nothing more is attempted than a beautiful air or an elegant movement, from time to time, it would seem that the public have altogether lost all sense of dramatic connexion: they are perfectly well satisfied with two acts from different operas in the same evening, or with seeing the representation of the last act of an opera before the first.

We do not therefore believe that we are saying too much when we affirm, that both dramatic poetry and the histrionic art are in the most woeful decline in Italy,* that the first foundation of a

* Gelsabigi attributes the cause of this state to the want of permanent companies of players, and of a capital. In this last reason there is certainly some foundation: in England, Spain, and France, a national system of dramatic art has been deve-

national theatre has not yet been laid, and that there is no prospect of their ever having one, till the prevailing ideas on the subject undergo a total change.

loped and established ; in Italy and Germany, where there are only capitals of separate states, but no general metropolis, great difficulties are opposed to the improvement of the theatre. Calzabigi could not adduce the obstacles arising from a false theory, for he was himself under their influence.

LECTURE IX.

Antiquities of the French stage.—Influence of Aristotle and the imitation of the ancients.—Investigation of the three unities.—

What is unity of action?—Unity of time.—Was it observed by the Greeks?—Unity of place as connected with it.—Mischiefs resulting from too narrow rules on the subject.

WE now proceed to the dramatic literature of the French. We find no reason for dwelling at any length on the first beginnings of tragedy in France. We may therefore leave to the French critics the task of depreciating the antiquities of their own literature, which they do with the mere view of adding to the glory of the succeeding age of Richelieu and Louis XIV. Their language, it is true, was then for the first time elaborated from the most indescribable wilderness of tastlessness and barbarity, while the harmonious diction of the Italian and Spanish poetry, which had long before developed itself without effort in the most beautiful luxuriance, was at that time rapidly degenerating. Hence, we are not to be astonished that the French lay such great stress on all the negative excellencies, and endeavour so much to avoid every thing like impropriety, and that from the dread of a relapse, this has always, since the period in question, been the general object of their critical labours. When La Harpe says of the tragedies of Corneille, that

their tone rises above flatness only to fall into the opposite extreme of affectation, in the proofs which he adduces we see no reason to differ from him.— A contemporary piece of Legouv , *The Death of Henry the Fourth*, has been lately printed, which is not only written in a ludicrous style, but in the general plan and distribution of the subject, with its prologue spoken by Satan and a chorus of pages, with its endless monologues and want of progress and action, betrays the infancy of the dramatic art, not a na ve infancy full of hope and expectation, but one disfigured by the most pedantic bombast and absurdity. With respect to the earlier tragical attempts of the French in the last half of the sixteenth, and the first third part of the seventeenth century, we refer to Fontenelle, La Harpe, the *Melanges litt raires* of Suard and Andr . We shall confine ourselves to the characterisation of three of their most celebrated tragic poets, *Corneille*, *Racine*, and *Voltaire*, who it would seem have given an immutable shape to their tragic stage. Our chief object however is an examination of the *system of tragic art*, practically followed by these poets, and by them partly, but by the French critics universally, considered as alone entitled to any authority, and every deviation from it viewed as a sin against good taste. If the system is in itself the best, we shall be compelled to allow that its execution is masterly, perhaps not to be surpassed. But the great question here is, how far the French tragedy is in spirit and inward essence related to the Greek, and

whether it deserves to be considered as an improvement upon it.

Of their first attempts it is only consistent with our object to observe, that the endeavour to imitate the ancients displayed itself at a very early period in France; and that they considered that the surest method of succeeding in this endeavour was to observe the strictest outward regularity of form, of which they derived their ideas more from Aristotle, and especially from Seneca, than from an intimate acquaintance with the Greek models themselves. In the first tragedies which were represented, the Cleopatra and Dido of *Jodelle*, a prologue and chorus were introduced: *Jean de la Peruse* translated the Medea of Seneca; *Garnier's* pieces are all taken from the Greek tragedies or from Seneca, but in the execution they bear a much closer resemblance to the latter. The writers of that day employed themselves also diligently on the Sophonisbe of Trissino, from a regard for its classic appearance. Whoever is acquainted with the mode of proceeding of real genius, which is impelled by the almost unconscious and immediate contemplation of great and important truths, and in no wise by mediate convictions obtained from deductions drawn in a round about way, will be on that account extremely suspicious of all activity in art, which originates in an abstract theory. But Corneille did not, like an antiquary, execute his dramas as so many learned school exercises, on the model of the ancients. Seneca, it is true, led him astray,

but he knew and loved the Spanish theatre, and it had a great influence on his mind. The first of his pieces with which it is generally allowed that the classical epoch of French tragedy begins, and which is certainly one of his best, the *Cid*, is well known to have been borrowed from the Spanish. It violates considerably the unity of place, if not also that of time, and it is animated throughout by the spirit of chivalrous love and honour. But the opinion of his contemporaries, that a tragedy must be framed accurately according to the rules of Aristotle, was so universally prevalent that it bore down all opposition. Corneille, almost at the close of his dramatic career, began to entertain scruples of conscience, and endeavoured in a separate treatise to prove that his pieces, in the composition of which he had never even thought of Aristotle, were however all accurately written according to his rules. This was no easy task, for he was obliged to have recourse to all manner of forced explanations. If he had established his case satisfactorily, we could only infer from it that the rules of Aristotle must be very loose and indeterminate, if such dissimilar works in spirit and form, as the tragedies of the Greeks and those of Corneille, should be equally true to them.

It is quite otherwise with Racine: of all the French poets he was, without doubt, the one who was best acquainted with the ancients, and he did not merely study them as a scholar, he felt them as a poet. He found however the practice of the theatre already firmly established, and he did not undertake to deviate from it for the sake of ap-

proaching these models. He only therefore appropriated the separate beauties of the Greek poets ; but whether from respect for the taste of his age, or from inclination, he remained faithful to the prevailing gallantry so foreign to the Greek tragedy, and for the most part made it the foundation of the intrigues of his piece.

Such was nearly the state of the French theatre till Voltaire made his appearance. He possessed but a moderate knowledge of the Greeks, of whom however he now and then spoke with enthusiasm, that on other occasions he might rank them below the more modern masters of his own nation, including himself ; but yet he always considered himself bound to preach up the grand severity and simplicity of the Greeks as essential to tragedy. He censured the deviations of his predecessors as errors, and insisted on purifying and at the same time enlarging the stage, as in his opinion, from the constraint of court manners, it had been almost straitened to the dimensions of an anti-chamber. He at first spoke of the bursts of genius in Shakspeare, and borrowed many things from this poet, at that time altogether unknown to his countrymen ; he insisted too on greater depth in the delineation of passion, on a more powerful theatrical effect ; he demanded a scene ornamented in a more majestic manner ; and, lastly, he not unfrequently endeavoured to give to his pieces a political or philosophical interest altogether foreign to poetry. His labours have unquestionably been of utility to the French stage, although in language and versifica-

tion (which in the classification of dramatic excellencies ought only to hold a secondary place, though in France they are alone decisive of the fate of a piece), he is, by most critics, considered as inferior to his predecessors, or at least to Racine. It is now the fashion to attack this idol of the last age on every point with the most unrelenting and partial hostility. His innovations on the stage are therefore cried down as so many literary heresies, even by the critical watchmen, who seem to think that the age of Louis XIV. has left nothing remaining throughout every succession of ages till the very end of the world, but a passive admiration of its perfections, and who therefore will not listen to the unhallowed idea of any thing like improvement. For authority is avowed with so little disguise as the first principle of the French critics, that this expression is quite current with them.

In so far as we have to express doubts of the unconditional authority of the rules followed by the old French tragic authors, of the pretended affinity between the spirit of their works, and the spirit of the Greek tragedians, and of the validity of many things which have been supposed to be essential proprieties, we find an associate in Voltaire. But in many other points he has, without examination, nay even unconsciously, adopted the maxims of his predecessors, and followed their practice. In opinions founded perhaps more on national peculiarities than on human nature and the essence of tragic poetry in general, he is equally implicated with them. On this account we may include him

along with them in the common examination ; we are not speaking of the execution of particular parts, but of the general principles of tragic art, which we are to collect from the shape of the works.

The consideration of the regularity insisted on brings us back to what are called the three unities of Aristotle. We shall examine the doctrine delivered by the Greek philosopher on this subject ; how far these rules were known to or observed by the Greek tragedians ; whether the French poets have in reality overcome the difficulty of observing them without constraint and improbability, or merely escaped from it with dexterity ; and finally, whether the merit of this observance is actually so great and essential as it has been deemed, and whether on the other hand more essential beauties must not be sacrificed for the sake of complying with it.

We may view the French tragedy under another aspect, in which it does not rest on the authority of the ancients : this is the union of poetry, with a number of social observances founded only on consent. On the subject in question the French are far less clear than on that of the rules ; for nations are usually not more capable of knowing and appreciating themselves than individuals. It is intimately connected with the spirit of French poetry in general, nay with their whole literature and the very language itself. All this has in France been formed under the guardianship of society, and has uniformly been guided and determined by it, a society which zealously imitated the tone of the capital, and this again took its direction from the

modes of a brilliant court. If such is really the case, as there can indeed be no difficulty in proving, we may easily conceive why the French literature, since the age of Louis XIV. has been and still is so well received in the upper ranks of society, in the fashionable world, throughout all Europe, while the body of the people, every where true to their own manners, have never shown any thing like a cordial liking to it. In this way, even in foreign countries, it finds again in some measure the place of its birth.

The far famed three unities, which have given rise to a whole Iliad of critical wars, are the *unities of action, time, and place.*

The validity of the first is universally allowed, but the difficulty is to agree about its signification ; and here I may venture to observe that it is no easy matter to come to an understanding on the subject.

The unities of place and time are considered by some as merely a secondary concern, while others give the utmost importance to them, and affirm that without them there can be no salvation for the dramatic poet. In France this zeal is not confined to the learned world, but seems to be a common concern of the nation. Every Frenchman, who has sucked in Boileau with his mother's milk, considers himself as much a natural born champion of the dramatic unities, as the kings of England since the time of Henry VIII. are hereditary *Defenders of the faith.*

It is amusing enough to see the name of Aristotle borrowed to sanction these three unities, while

the only one of which he speaks with any degree of fulness is the first, the unity of action. With respect to the unity of time he merely throws out an indefinite hint, and as to the unity of place he does not even say a single syllable on the subject.

I am not therefore in a polemical relation with Aristotle, for I do not in any wise dispute the unity of action when properly understood; I only consider a greater latitude with respect to place and time as defensible in many species of the drama, nay as even essential to them. But I must first say a few words respecting the poetics of Aristotle, which, though consisting but of a few pages, have given rise to many voluminous commentaries, that we may place ourselves in the proper point of view,

It is well known that this treatise is a mere fragment, and that many important subjects* are in no degree touched upon in it. Several learned men have even been of opinion that it is not a fragment of the true original, but of an extract which some person made for his own improvement. All philological critics are however unanimous in the opinion that the text is very much falsified and corrupted, and they have endeavoured to restore it by their conjectural emendations. Its great obscurity is either expressly lamented by the commentators or confirmed by the fact, that they all reject the interpretations of their predecessors, while they cannot make their own palatable to those who follow them.

It is very different with the rhetoric of Aristotle.

This last work is undoubtedly genuine, perfect, and easily understood. How does he consider the oratorical art in it? As the sister of logic, which must produce persuasion by a method somewhat similar to that employed in operating conviction by logical deductions. This is nearly the same thing as if we were to consider architecture merely as the art of building with solidity and convenience. These are certainly the first requisites, but a great deal more is still necessary before we can consider it as one of the fine arts. We expect that architecture should unite these essential objects of an edifice with beauty of plan, and harmony of proportion, and that the whole should produce a corresponding impression. When we see that Aristotle included only in oratory what is addressed to the understanding, and what is subservient to an external aim, without making any allowance for imagination or feeling, are we to be astonished that he was still less thoroughly acquainted with the secret of poetry, that art which is absolved from every aim but the unconditional one of creating the beautiful by means of free invention and clothing it in suitable language?—I have already had the hardihood to maintain this heresy, and hitherto I have seen no reason for retracting my opinion. Lessing thought otherwise. But what if Lessing, with his acute and dissecting criticism, split exactly on the same rock? This species of criticism is completely victorious when it exposes what cannot be admitted by the understanding in works which the understanding has

alone produced; but it will hardly be sufficient to rise to the idea of a creation of art conceived in the true spirit of genius.

The philosophical theory of all the fine arts was in general but little cultivated among the ancients as a separate science; of technical works on each separate art, in which the means of execution were alone considered, they had an ample sufficiency. Were I to select a guide from among the ancient philosophers, it should undoubtedly be Plato, who acquired the idea of the beautiful not by dissection, which never can give it, but by contemplative inspiration, and in whose works the germs of a genuine philosophy of art, are every where scattered.

Let us now hear what Aristotle says respecting the unity of action.

“ We assume that tragedy is the imitation of a perfect and entire action which has a certain magnitude: for there may be a whole without any magnitude whatever. A whole is what has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning is what is not necessarily after another thing, but that which from its nature has something after it, or arising out of it. The end on the other hand is what in its nature is after something else, either necessarily, or usually, but after which there is nothing. The middle, what is itself after another thing, and after which there is something. Hence poems which are properly composed ought neither to begin nor to end accidentally, but according to the principles above laid down.”

Strictly speaking, it is a contradiction to say that a whole, which must have parts, can be without magnitude. But Aristotle immediately states in explanation, that he means by magnitude what is essential to beauty, a certain measure which is neither so small as not to allow us to distinguish its parts, nor so extensive as to prevent us from taking the whole in at one view. This is therefore merely an external definition of the beautiful derived from experience, and founded on the quality of our organs of sense and our powers of comprehension. However, his application of it to the drama is singular enough. "It must have an extension, but such as may easily be taken in by the memory. The determination of the length according to the wants of the representation, does not belong to the art. With respect to the essence of the thing, the composition will be the more beautiful the more it is extended without prejudice to its comprehensibility." This opinion would be highly favourable for the compositions of Shakespeare and other romantic poets, who have included a much more extensive circle of life, character, and events, in one picture, than is to be found in the simple Greek tragedy, if we could only show that they have given it the necessary unity, and such a magnitude as can be clearly taken in at a view, and this we can have no hesitation in affirming to have been actually done by them.

In another place Aristotle requires the same unity of action from the epic poet, as from the dramatic; he repeats the above definitions, and says that the poet must not resemble the historian, who

relates contemporary events, although they have had no influence on one another. Here we have still a more definite demand of connexion between the events represented as causes and effects, than that which was before stated in his explanation of the parts of a whole. He owns however that the epic poet may take in a much greater number of events connected with one main action, as the narrative form enables him to describe several actions going on at the same time ; on the other hand the dramatic poet cannot represent many things at the same time, but merely what is going on upon the stage, and the part which the persons who appear there take in one action. But what if the dramatic poet should find means, from a different constitution of the scene, and a more perfect theatrical perspective, to develope in a due manner and without confusion, although in a more limited space, a fable not inferior in extent to the epic poem ? Where would be the objection, if the only obstacle was the supposed impossibility ?

This is nearly all which is contained in the Poetics of Aristotle on the subject of unity of action. A short investigation will serve to show how very much these anatomical ideas, which have been stamped as rules, are below the essential requisites of poetry.

Unity of action is expected. What is action ? This is generally got rid of, as if it was altogether self-evident. In the higher proper signification, action is an activity dependent on the will of man. Its unity will consist in the direction towards one sole aim ; and to its completion belongs all that lies between the first determination, and the execution of the deed.

This idea of action is applicable to many of the tragedies of the ancients; for instance, the murder of his mother by Orestes, the determination of Œdipus to discover and punish the murderer of Laius: it is not however applicable to all of them; still less is it applicable to the greater part of modern tragedies, at least if we seek the action in the principal characters. What happens through them, and proceeds from them, has frequently no more connexion with a voluntary determination, than the shipwreck of a vessel on a rock in a storm. But even in the sense of the ancients we must include in the action the determination to bear the consequences of the deed with heroic resolution, and the execution of this determination will belong to its completion. The pious determination of Antigone to perform the last duties to her unburied brother is soon executed without much difficulty; but its claims to become the object of a tragedy rest in her suffering death for it without repentance, and without showing any symptoms of weakness. And to take an example from another sphere, is not Shakspeare's Julius Cæsar, with respect to action, constructed on the same principle? Brutus is the hero of the piece: the completion of his great determination does not consist in the mere assassination of Cæsar (an action ambiguous in itself, and of which the motives might have been ambition and jealousy), but in this, that he proves himself the genuine champion of Roman liberty, by the ready indifference with which he sacrifices his amiable life for that object,

Farther, there could be no knot in the piece without opposition, and this generally arises out of the contradictory motives and views of the different persons. When we limit therefore the idea of an action to the determination and the deed, we shall then have for the most part two or three actions in one tragedy. Which of them is the principal action? Every person thinks his own the most important, for every man is his own central point.—The determination of Creon to maintain his royal dignity, by punishing with death the person who inters Polynices, is equally fixed with the determination of Antigone, equally important as we see at the end, and not less dangerous, as it draws along with it the destruction of the whole house of Creon. It may be perhaps said that the negative determination is merely to be considered as the completion of the affirmative. But what if each determines on something not exactly opposite, but altogether different? In the *Andromache* of Racine, Orestes wishes to prevail on Hermione to return his love; Hermione is resolved either to compel Pyrrhus to marry her, or to be revenged on him; Pyrrhus wishes to get rid of Hermione, and to be united to Andromache; Andromache is desirous of saving her son, and at the same time remaining true to the memory of her husband. Yet nobody ever refused to allow the unity of this piece, as the whole has a common connexion, and ends with one common catastrophe. But which of the actions of the four persons is the main action? In strength of passion their endeavours are pretty nearly equal to

one another, in all of them the whole happiness of life is at stake ; the action of *Andromache* has however the advantage of moral dignity, and Racine was therefore perfectly right in naming the piece after her.

We see here a new definition in the conception of action, namely, the reference to the idea of moral liberty, by which alone man is considered as the first author of his determination. For, considered within the province of experience, the determination as beginning of the action is not merely cause, but is again the effect of preceding motives. We have, in this reference to a higher idea, sought the *unity* and *integrity* of tragedy in the sense of the ancients ; namely, its absolute beginning is the proof of liberty, and its absolute end the acknowledgment of necessity. We consider ourselves justified in affirming that Aristotle was altogether a stranger to this view : he never speaks of the idea of fate as essential to tragedy. We must not in general expect from him a strict idea of action, as determination and deed. He says somewhere : “ The extent of a tragedy is always sufficiently great, if, by a series of probable or necessary consequences, a change from infelicity to felicity, or from felicity to infelicity, can be brought about.” Hence it is evident that he understands by *action*, like the whole of the moderns, merely something that takes place. According to him, this action must have beginning, middle, and end, and consequently consist of a plurality of events connected with one another. But where are the limits of this plurality ? Is not

the concatenation of causes and effects, backwards and forwards, without end ; and consequently should we not begin and break off every where in the same arbitrary manner ? In this way, can there be either beginning or end, corresponding to the very accurate definition of Aristotle ? Completion would therefore be altogether impossible. If however nothing more is required in the unity of the plurality of events than casual connexion, then the rule is indefinite in the extreme, and the unity may be narrowed or enlarged at pleasure. For every series of events or actions, which are occasioned by one another, whatever its extent, may always be comprehended under a single point of view, and denoted by a single name. When Calderon, in one drama describes the conversion of Peru to Christianity, from the very beginning, that is, the discovery of the country, to the completion, and when nothing actually appears in his piece which had not an influence on that conversion ; is not this as much an exemplification of unity in the above sense, as the most simple Grecian tragedy, which however the champions of the rules of Aristotle will never be induced to allow ?

Corneille was well aware of the difficulty of a proper definition of unity in an inevitable plurality of subordinate actions, and endeavoured in this way to get rid of it. " I assume," says he, " that the unity of action consists, in comedy, in the unity of the intrigue, or the obstacle to the views of the principal persons : and in tragedy, in the unity of the danger, whether the hero sinks under or extri-

cates himself from it: I will not however affirm that several dangers in tragedy, and several intrigues or obstacles in comedy may not be allowable, when they are necessarily connected with one another; for then the escape from the first danger does not make the action complete, because it draws a second after it, and the clearing up of one intrigue does not place the acting persons at their ease, because it involves them in another."

In the first place the difference here assumed between tragic and comic unity is altogether unessential. For the nature of the connexion is not influenced by the circumstance, that the events in tragedy are more serious, and attended with great danger; the embarrassment of the characters in comedy when they cannot accomplish their views, their intrigue, may equally receive the appellation of danger. Corneille, like most others, refers all to the idea of connexion between cause and effect. No doubt when the principal persons, either from marriage or death, are placed in a state of tranquillity, the drama comes to a close; but if nothing more is necessary to its unity than the uninterrupted progress of a collision, which serves to keep up a dramatic movement, simplicity will then be found to come but poorly off: without violating this rule of unity, we may go on to an almost endless accumulation of events, as in the *Thousand and One Nights*, where the thread of the story is never once broken.

De la Motte, a French author, who wrote against the whole of the unities, wishes, in place of unity of

action, to substitute the words, *unity of interest*. If the expression is not confined to the interest in the fate of a single person, but is used to signify in general the direction of the mind during the aspect of an event, I should then consider it, so understood, as the most satisfactory and the nearest to the truth.

But we should derive but little advantage from groping about empirically with the commentators on Aristotle. The idea of *one* and of *whole* is in no manner derived from experience, but arises out of the original free-activity of our mind. To account for the manner in which we in general arrive at this idea, and think of one and a whole, nothing is less requisite than a system of metaphysics.

The external sense perceives only in objects an indefinite plurality of distinguishable parts; the judgment, by which we comprehend these parts in one entire and perfect unity, is always founded on the reference to a higher sphere of ideas. Thus, for example, the mechanical unity of a watch consists in the aim of measuring time; this aim however is only obvious to the understanding, and can neither be seen by the eyes, nor laid hold of by the hands: the organical unity of a plant and an animal consists in the idea of life; and the inward contemplation of life, which is itself uncorporeal, although it appears through the medium of the corporeal world, is brought by us to the individual living object, otherwise we could not obtain it through that object.

The separate parts of a work of art, and consequently, returning immediately to the question before us, the separate parts of a tragedy, must not

be received by the eye and ear alone, but be taken in by the understanding. They are all subservient to one common aim, namely, to produce a joint impression on the mind. The unity consists therefore as in the above examples, but in a higher sphere, in the feeling or in the reference to ideas. This is the same thing; for the feeling, in so far as it is not merely sensual and passive, is our sense, our organ for the infinite, which forms us for ideas.

Far from rejecting therefore the law of a perfect unity in tragedy as unnecessary, I require a unity which lies much deeper, is much more fervent, and more mysterious than that with which most critics are satisfied. I find this unity in the tragical compositions of Shakspeare, in as great perfection as in those of Æschylus and Sophocles; while on the contrary, I do not find it in many of those tragedies extolled as correct by the critics of the dissecting school.

I hold the logical coherence, the casual connexion, as equally essential to tragedy and every serious drama, for this reason, that all the mental powers influence one another, and that when the understanding is compelled to make a leap, the imagination and feeling of the composition no longer follow with the same alacrity; but then the champions of what is called regularity have applied this prescription with a degree of petty subtlety, which can have no other effect than that of impeding the poet, and rendering it impossible for him to produce works of genuine excellence.

Do not let us suppose that the order of sequence in a tragedy resembles a slender thread, which we

are every moment in anxious dread of snapping (on account of the admitted inevitable plurality of subordinate actions and interests, this simile is by no means correctly applicable); but rather let us suppose it a mighty stream, which overcomes many obstacles in its raging course, and at last loses itself in the repose of the ocean. It springs perhaps from different fountains, and it certainly receives other rivers, which hasten towards it from opposite points of the compass. Why should not the poet be allowed to conduct various independent streams of human passions and endeavours, separately from each other, for a time, till the moment of their raging junction, if he can place the spectator on an eminence from whence he may overlook the whole of their course? And if this great collection of waters should again divide into several branches, and pour itself into the sea by several mouths, is it not still the same stream?

So much for the unity of action. With respect to the unity of place, we find only the following passage in Aristotle: "Moreover the epic poem is distinguished from tragedy by its length: for the latter seeks as far as possible to circumscribe itself within one revolution of the sun, or to exceed this very little; but the epic poem is unlimited in point of time, and in that respect different from tragedy. At first however this was managed in the same manner in tragedies and epic poems."

We may in the first place observe that here Aristotle gives no precept, but merely makes historical mention of a peculiarity, which he observed

in the Grecian examples before him. But what if the Greek tragedians had particular reasons for circumscribing themselves within this extent of time, which with the constitution of our theatres would no longer have existed? We shall immediately see that this was actually the case.

Corneille with great justice finds this rule extremely inconvenient, and prefers therefore the easiest interpretation. He says he should, without hesitation, extend the duration of the action even to thirty hours. Others however stoutly insist on the action occupying no longer a period than that of its representation, that is from two to three hours.—The dramatic poet must, according to them, be punctual to his hour. In the main, the latter manage their cause better than the more lenient critics. For the only foundation for the rule is the observation of a probability which is by them supposed to be necessary for illusion, namely, that the actual time and that of the representation should be the same. If we once admit a difference between them, such as that from two to thirty hours, we may upon the same principle go still a great way farther. This idea of illusion has occasioned great errors in the theory of art. To it we are to attribute the general mistake of supposing that the subject represented is confounded with reality. In that case the terrors of tragedy would be a true torture to us, an incubus of the fancy. No, the theatrical as well as every other poetical illusion, is a waking dream, to which we voluntarily resign ourselves. To produce it, the poet and actors must

agitate the minds in a powerful manner, and the probabilities of calculation do not contribute in the smallest degree towards it. This demand of literal deception, pushed to the extreme, would exclude every poetic form; for we know very well that the mythological and historical persons did not speak our language, that impassioned pain does not express itself in verse, &c. What sort of unpoetical spectator would he be who, instead of following the incidents with his participation, should, like a gaoler, with his watch or his hour-glass in his hand, count out to the heroes of the tragedy the minutes which they still have to act and live! Is our soul then a piece of clock-work, that tells the hours and minutes with infallible accuracy? Has it not rather a very different measure of time for the conditions of entertainment and wearisomeness? In the one case, how rapidly the hours fly under an easy and varied activity; in the other, in which we feel all our mental powers clogged and impeded, they are stretched out to an immeasurable length. Thus it is during the present; but it is completely the reverse in recollection: the interval of dead and dull uniformity disappears in a moment; while that which marks an overflow of varied impressions increases in the same proportion. Our body is subjected to external astronomical time, because the organical operations are regulated by it; but our mind has its own ideal time, which is nothing but the consciousness of the progressive developement of our existence. In this kind of chronometer the intervals of an indifferent inactivity pass for nothing, and two

important moments, though separated by intervening years, are immediately linked to one another. Hence it is usual with us, when intensely occupied with any object previous to falling asleep, to take up the very same train of thought immediately on our awaking, and the intervening dreams vanish into their unessential obscurity. It is the very same with dramatic composition: our imagination overleaps with ease the times which are presupposed and indicated, but which are omitted because nothing important takes place in them; it dwells solely on the decisive moments placed before it, by the compression of which the poet gives wings to the lazy course of days and hours.

But it will be urged that the ancient tragedians observed the unity of time. This expression is by no means correct; it should at least be the identity of the time of the representation with the actual time. And even then it does not apply to the ancients; what they observe is nothing but the apparent continuity of time. It is of importance to attend to this distinction of *apparent*; for they unquestionably allow, during the choral songs, a much greater number of events to take place than could actually happen within such a period of time. In the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus the whole interval, from the destruction of Troy to his arrival in Mycenæ, is included, which must have consisted of a very considerable number of days; in the *Trachinæ* of Sophocles, during the course of the piece, the voyage from Thessaly to Eubœa is thrice performed; in the *Supplices* of Euripides, during a

single choral ode, an *entire* expedition from Athens against Thebes takes place, a battle is fought, and the General returns victorious. So far were the Greeks from this sort of minute and painful calculation. They had however a particular reason for observing the apparent continuity of time in the constant presence of the chorus. When the chorus leaves the stage, the constant progress is then interrupted, of which we have a very striking instance in the *Eumenides* of Æschylus, where the whole interval is omitted, which was necessary to allow Orestes to proceed from Delphi to Athens. Moreover, between the three pieces of a trilogy, which were consecutively represented, and which constituted a whole, there were as considerable intervals as those between the three acts of many a Spanish drama.

The moderns have, from their division into acts, which was, properly speaking, unknown to the Greek tragedy, a convenient means of extending the period of representation without impropriety. For the poet may easily presume so far on the imagination of the spectator, as to suppose that he will during the interruption of the whole representation, imagine the lapse of a much longer interval than that which is filled up by the actual time of the music which is performed between the acts; otherwise he might be invited to come again the next day for the following act, to make it appear the more natural to him. The division into acts had its origin with the new comedy, when the chorus was excluded. Horace prescribes that a play shall neither have more nor fewer than five acts. The rule is so unessential that

Wicland was of opinion Horace was here laughing at the young Pisos in urging the importance of an observance like this with such solemnity of tone. If in the ancient tragedy we are to suppose the conclusion of an act wherever the stage remains empty, and the chorus alone proceeds with dancing and song, we shall often have fewer than five acts, but often also more than five. As an observation that, in a representation of between two and three hours, so many resting points are necessary for the attention, it may be allowed to pass ; but I should be anxious to hear any reason derived from the nature of dramatic poetry, why a drama must have so many and only so many divisions. But the world is governed by custom and tradition : attempts to diminish the number of acts have been favourably received ; but it is still considered as a most dangerous and unhallowed innovation to exceed the consecrated number of five.*

The division into acts seems to me erroneous, when nothing takes place in the intervals, as is so often the case in modern pieces, and when we perceive the persons at the beginning of the new act in exactly the same situation as at the close of the foregoing. And yet this standing still has given much less offence than the adoption of a considerable interval, or the representation of extravagant incidents, because the former is merely a negative error.

* Three unities, five acts : why not seven persons ? These rules seem to proceed according to odd numbers,

The romantic poets take the liberty of changing the scene, even during the course of an act. As the stage is always previously empty, these are interruptions of the continuity, which justify them in the adoption of so many intervals. If we stumble at this, but admit the propriety of a division into acts, we have only to consider these changes of scene in the light of a greater number of short acts. It will perhaps be argued, this is justifying one error by another, the violation of the unity of time by the violation of the unity of place: we shall therefore proceed to point out at more length the insufficiency of the last mentioned rule.

In vain, as we have already said, shall we seek for any opinion in Aristotle on the subject. It is asserted that the rule was observed by the ancients. Not always, only generally. Of seven pieces of *Æschylus*, and the same number of *Sophocles*, there are two, the *Eumenides* and *Ajax*, in which the scene is changed. That they generally retain the same scene follows naturally from the constant presence of the chorus, which must be got rid of in a suitable manner before a change can take place. But then we have to consider that their scene represented a much wider extent than ours in most cases; not a mere room, but the open space before several buildings: and the disclosing the interior of a house by means of the encyclema, may be considered in the same light as the drawing a back curtain on our stage.

The objection to the change of scene is also founded on the erroneous idea of illusion which we

have already attempted to refute. We must not transfer the action to another place, lest the illusion should be dispelled. But even allowing that we are in reality to consider the place represented as the actual place, in this case the decoration of our scene ought to be altogether different from what it now is.* Johnson, a critic, in general an advocate for strict rules, very judiciously observes, that if our imagination once goes so far as to transport us eighteen hundred years back to Alexandria, and allows us to suppose the story of Antony and Cleopatra to be taking place before us, the second step of transporting ourselves from Alexandria to Rome, is much more easy. The capability of our mind to fly in thought through the immensity of time and space with the rapidity of lightning is well known and acknowledged in real life; and shall poetry, the object of which is to add all manner of wings to our imagination, and which has at command all the magic of genuine illusion, that is, of animated and overpowering fiction, be alone obliged to renounce this general prerogative of our species?

Voltaire wishes to derive the unity of place and time from the unity of action, but his conclusions are superficial in the extreme. "For the same reason," says he, "the unity of place is essential;

* It is merely calculated for a single point of view: seen from every other place, the broken lines betray the imperfection of the imitation. So little attention do the audience in general pay to these niceties, that they are not even shocked when the actors enter and disappear through a wall without a door, between the side scenes.

because one action cannot go on in several places at the same time." But we have already seen that several persons necessarily take a part in one principal action, that it consists of a plurality of subordinate actions, and why should not these go on in different places? Is not the same war frequently carried on in Europe and India at the same time, and must not the historian equally recount the events which take place on both these scenes?

"The unity of time," he adds, "is naturally connected with the two first. When the poet represents to me a conspiracy, and the action includes fourteen days, he must account to me for all that has taken place in these fourteen days." Yes, for all that belongs to the business; the rest which lies between, he passes over in silence like every good story-teller, and no person ever thinks of the omission. "When he therefore places before me the events of fourteen days, this gives me at least fourteen different actions, however small they may be." No doubt, if the poet were to be so unskilful as to wind off the fourteen days one after another with visible precision, if we should see this exact number of revolutions of day and night, and if the characters were so many times to rise and go to bed. But he thrusts the periods, during which the action is imperceptible in its progress, into the back ground, annihilates in the composition the intervals during which it stands absolutely still, and contrives with a rapid pencil to give something like an accurate idea of the time which we must suppose to have elapsed between the divisions. Why is the

privilege of adopting a much wider space between the two extremes of the piece than that of the actual duration of the representation, of importance, and even indispensable to many subjects? The example of a conspiracy given by Voltaire comes here very opportunely.

A conspiracy contrived and executed in two hours is, in the first place, not credible. Moreover, it is ethically, that is with reference to the characters of the persons of the piece, very different from the idea of a conspiracy where the determination, however dangerous, must be persevered in and concealed for a considerable time. Although the poet does not exhibit this lapse of time immediately in the work, he allows us however to perceive it perspectively as in a glass, in the minds of the characters. In this kind of perspective Shakspeare is the greatest master whom I know: a single word frequently reveals an almost interminable series of preceding states of mind. The poet, confined within the narrow limits of time, will in many subjects be forced to mutilate the action, while he must begin quite close to the last determination, or be under the necessity of hurrying on its progress in a most unsuitable manner: on each supposition he must diminish the grand picture of a strong purpose, not a momentary effervescence, but a firm resolution maintained undauntedly, amidst every change of external circumstances, till the time is ripe for execution. It will no longer be what Shakspeare has so often painted, and what he has described in the following lines:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
 And the first motion, all the interim is
 Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream :
 'The genius, and the mortal instruments,
 Are then in council ; and the state of man,
 Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
 The nature of an insurrection.

But why are the Greek and romantic poets so different in their practice with respect to place and time ? The spirit of our criticism will not allow us to follow the practice of many critics, who in a summary manner pronounce the latter barbarians. We conceive on the contrary that they lived in very cultivated times, and were themselves highly cultivated. The state of the ancient stage, as we have already said, led naturally to the apparent continuity of time and the immutability of the scene, and the observation of this custom was also favoured by the nature of the materials on which the Grecian dramatists had to work. These materials were mythology, and consequently they were already formed into fables ; for the former poetic compositions had collected together, and united in constant and distinct masses, what in reality is detached and scattered about in every possible manner. Moreover, the heroic age which they painted was at once extremely simple in manners, and pregnant with wonderful events ; and hence every thing of itself went straight forward towards the aim of a tragical determination.

But still the principal cause of the difference is the plastic spirit of the antique, and the picturesque

spirit of the romantic poetry. Sculpture directs our attention exclusively to the groupe exhibited to us, it disentangles it as far as possible from all external accompaniments, and where they cannot be altogether dispensed with, they are indicated as lightly as possible. Painting, on the other hand, delights in exhibiting, in a minute manner, along with the principal figures, the surrounding locality and all the secondary objects, and to open to us in the back ground a prospect into a boundless distance: light and perspective are its peculiar charms. Hence the dramatic, and especially the tragic art of the ancients annihilates in some measure the external circumstances of space and time; while the romantic drama adorns by their changes its more diversified pictures. Or to express myself in other terms, the principle of the antique poetry is ideal, that of the romantic mystical: the former subjects space and time to the internal free-activity of the mind; the latter adores these inconceivable essences as supernatural powers, in whom something of the divinity has its abode.

I come now to the influence which the above rules of unity, strictly interpreted and received as inviolable, along with other conventional rules, have had on the shape of French tragedy.

With a state of the stage altogether different, with materials for the most part dissimilar, and handled in an opposite spirit, they were still desirous of retaining the rules of the ancient tragedy, in so far as they knew them from Aristotle.

They prescribed the same simplicity of action as

in the Grecian tragedy, and yet they left out the lyrical part, which is a protracted developement of the moment, and consequently a pause in the action. This part could not indeed be retained, as we no longer possess the ancient music, which was subservient to the poetry instead of governing it like ours. When we deduct from the Greek tragedies the choral odes, and the lyrical pieces which are often put in the mouths of individuals, they are nearly one half shorter than a common French tragedy. Voltaire complains frequently in his prefaces of the great difficulty of procuring materials for five long acts. How are the gaps arising from the leaving out of the lyrical parts now filled up? By intrigue. With the Greeks the action, which is calculated for a few great moments, rolls on without interruption to its determination; but instead of this the French have been obliged to introduce secondary characters, whose opposite views may give rise to a multitude of impeding incidents, that our attention, or rather our curiosity, may be kept up to the close. Every thing like simplicity was now therefore at an end; but they flattered themselves that they had preserved a unity for the understanding, by means of an artificial intrigue.

Intrigue is not a tragical motive in itself; it is essential to the new comedy, as we have already shown. Comedy must often be satisfied with an obreptitious resting-place for the understanding, but this is by no means the poetical side of this demi-prosaic species of drama. Although the French tragedy endeavours in particular parts to rise as

high as possible above comedy, by means of seriousness, dignity, and pathos, it still, in my opinion, in its general structure and composition, bears but too much affinity to it. In many French tragedies I find only a unity for the understanding, while the feeling remains unsatisfied. From the complication of painful and violent situations we come at last, it is true, happily or unhappily, to a state of repose; but in the course of affairs exhibited to us there is no secret and mysterious revelation of a higher order of things; we find no allusion to the consolatory idea of heaven, in the display of the dignity of human nature, either in its conflicts with fate or with an over-ruling providence. To such a tranquillization of feeling poetical justice is partly unnecessary, and partly also, from the very ambiguous and imperfect manner in which it is usually exercised, very far from sufficient. But even poetical justice (which I cannot help considering as an exemplification of a doctrine false in itself, and of which the aim is not the excitation of truly moral feelings) has not unfrequently been altogether neglected by the French tragedians.

The use of intrigue is certainly well calculated to effect the short duration of an important action. For whoever carries on intrigues is expeditious, and loses no time in attaining his object. But the violent course of human destinies proceeds with measured step, like the change of seasons: great designs ripen slowly; the dark suggestions of deadly fraud are shy and dilatory in leaving the abysses of

the mind for the light of day ; and, as Horace with equal truth and beauty observes, the flying criminal is only limpingly followed by penal retaliation.* Let any one attempt, for instance, to circumscribe the gigantic picture of Macbeth's murder, his tyrannical usurpation, and final fall, within the narrow limits of the unity of time, and he will then see, that, however many of the events which Shakspeare successively exhibits before us in such dread array, he may have placed anterior to the commencement of the piece, and made the subject of after recital, he has altogether deprived it of its sublimity of import. This drama, it is true, comprehends a considerable period of time : but in the rapidity of its progress have we leisure to calculate this ? We see, as it were, the fates weaving their dark web on the bosom of time ; and the storm and whirlwind of events, which impel the hero to the first daring attempt, which afterwards lead him to commit innumerable crimes to secure the fruits of it, and drive him at last, amidst numerous perils, to his destruction in the heroic combat, draw us irresistibly along with them. Such a tragical exhibition resembles the course of a comet, which, hardly visible at first, and only important to the astro-nomic eye, when appearing in the heaven in a nebulous distance, soon soars with an unheard of and perpetually increasing rapidity towards the

* *Rarò antecedentem scelestum
Deseruit pede pœna claudo.*

TRANS.

central point of our system, spreading dismay among the nations of the earth, till in a moment, with its portentous tail, it overspreads the half of the firmament with flaming fire.

LECTURE X.

The same subject continued.—Influence of these rules on French tragedy.—Manner of treating mythological and historical materials.—Idea of tragical dignity.—Observations of conventional rules.—False system of expositions.—Use at first made of the Spanish theatre.—General character of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire.—Review of their most important works.—Thomas Corneille, and Crebillon.

THE French poets, for the sake of the unity of time to which they are subjected, must renounce all those effects which proceed from the gradually accelerated growth of any object in the mind, or in the external world, through the course of time. The unity of time, with their wretched decoration of the stage, deprived them in a great measure of whatever in a drama is calculated to fascinate the eye. Accidental circumstances might recommend a more close observance of this rule, or render it even indispensable. From an observation of Corneille,* we are led to conjecture that machinery was at that time, in France, extremely clumsy and imperfect. It was moreover the general custom for a number of distinguished spectators to have seats

* In his *Premier Discours sur la Poesie Dramatique* he says: "Une chanson a quelquefois bonne grace; et dans les pieces de machines cet ornement est redevenu necessaire pour remplir les oreilles du spectateur, pendant que les machines descendent."

on both sides of the stage itself, which hardly left a breadth of ten paces for the free movements of the actors. Regnard, in his *Distrain*, gives us an amusing description of the noise and confusion occasioned by the fashionable *petit-maitres* who in his day occupied this privileged place, and who chattered and laughed behind the backs of the actors, disturbing the spectators, and drawing their attention from the play. This impropriety continued down to the time of Voltaire, who had the merit, after repeated endeavours, of at last obtaining its complete abolition, when *Semiramis* was brought out. How could they have ventured on a change of decoration in presence of such an unpoetical chorus as this, totally unconnected with the piece, and yet thrust into the very middle of the representation. In the *Cid*, the scene manifestly changes several times in the course of the same act, and yet it is never changed in the representation. In the English and Spanish plays of those times, this was also generally the case, but still certain signs were agreed on which served to denote the change of place, and the pliant imagination of the spectators followed the poet whithersoever he chose. But in France, the young men of quality who sat on the stage lay in wait for opportunities of making laughable discoveries; and as all theatrical effect requires a certain distance, and appears ludicrous when too closely seen, every thing was confined to the dialogue between a few characters, and the stage was subjected to all the formalities of an anti-chamber.

The scene, for the most part, actually represented an anti-chamber, or at least a hall in the interior of a palace. As the action of the Greek tragedies is always carried on in open places majestically surrounded, the French poets have given to their mythological materials, in so far as the scene is concerned, the manners of modern courts. In a princely palace no violence, no failure in social decency is allowed; and as in a tragedy affairs cannot always proceed with pure compliment, every act of a bolder description, every exercise of power, every thing calculated to make a strong impression on the senses, is transacted behind the scenes, and merely related by confidants or other messengers. And yet Horace long ago remarked, that what is communicated to the ear excites the mind in a much feebler degree than what is exhibited to the eye, and what the spectator relates to himself. He only recommends that what is incredible and revoltingly cruel should be withdrawn from observation. The dramatic effect of the visible may, it is true, be very much abused; and it is possible for a theatre to degenerate into a noisy arena of mere bodily exhibitions, to which words and gestures may be superfluous appendages. But the opposite extreme, of allowing no conviction to the eye, and always referring to something absent, is certainly equally undeserving of approbation. In many French tragedies the spectator might be led to entertain a feeling that great actions were actually taking place, but that he had made choice of a place which would not admit him to be an eye-witness of them. It is certain

that the effect of a drama is very much impaired when the effects which we observe proceed from causes which are invisible and at a distance. The converse of this is preferable,—to show the cause itself, and merely to allow the effect to be recounted. Voltaire was aware of the injury which theatrical effect suffered from the established practice of the tragic stage in France; he frequently insists on richer scenical decorations; and he himself in his pieces, and others after his example, have ventured to represent many things to the eye, which before would have been considered as unsuitable or ridiculous. But notwithstanding this attempt, and the earlier one of Racine in his *Athalie*, the eye is now more out of favour than ever with the fashionable critics. Wherever any thing is to be seen, or any action to be bodily executed, they scent a melodrama; and the idea that tragedy, if they were not incessantly to watch over its purity or rather its bald insipidity, might be gradually amalgamated with this species of play, (of which a word hereafter), is a downright abomination to them.

Voltaire has indulged in various infractions of the unity of time, but still he has not dared directly to attack the rule itself as unessential. He merely wishes to see a greater latitude given to its interpretation. It is sufficient if the action takes place within the walls of a palace or a town, though in different parts of it. He wishes however, in order to avoid a change of decoration, that it should be so contrived, as at once to comprehend the various scenes. Here he betrays very confused ideas, both

of architecture and perspective. He refers to the theatre of Palladio at Vicenza, which he could hardly have ever seen: for his account of this theatre, which, as we have already observed, is in itself only a misconception of the nature of the antique scene, appears to be altogether founded on descriptions which he did not understand. In his *Semiramis*, where he first attempted to carry his principles on this subject into practice, he has fallen into a singular error. Instead of allowing the persons to proceed to various places, he has made the places actually repair to the persons. The scene in the third act is a cabinet; this cabinet, in Voltaire's own words (before the queen leaves it), gives way to a large hall splendidly ornamented. The Mausoleum of Ninus, which was at first in an open place before the palace, opposite to the temple of the Magi, has also found means to steal to the side of the throne in this hall. After giving out its ghost to the light of day, to the terror of many beholders, and again receiving it back, it repairs in the following act to its old place, where it probably had left its obelisks behind. In the fifth act we see that it is very spacious, and provided with subterraneous passages. What a noise the French critics would make, were any foreigner to commit such ridiculous blunders.*

* In *Brutus* we have another example of this running about of the scene with the persons. In front there is a spacious decoration: the Senate is assembled between the Capitoline temple and the house of Brutus, in the open air. Afterwards, on the rising of the assembly, Arons and Albin alone remain

We may in general observe with respect to the unity of place, that it is often very unsatisfactorily observed by the French poets, as well as by all who follow the same system of rules, even in comedy. The scene is not, it is true, changed, but things follow one another which do not usually happen in the same place. What can be more improbable than that people should confide their secrets to one another in the very place near which they know their enemies are? or that conspiracies should be hatched against a prince in his own anti-chamber? Great importance is attached to the circumstance of the stage never remaining empty in the course of an act. This is called binding the scenes. But the rule is frequently only observed in appearance, as the persons of the preceding scene go out at one door in the very moment when those of the next are entering at another. Moreover, they are not to enter or disappear without a motive distinctly announced: for the latter case particular pains are taken; the confidants are dispatched on missions, and persons of equal rank are also expressly, however uncourteously, told to go out of the way.—

behind, and now it is said: *qui sont supposés être entrés de la salle d' audience dans un autre appartement de la maison de Brutus*. What is the poet's meaning here? Is the scene changed without being empty, or does he trust so far to the imagination of his spectators, as to suppose that, contrary to the evidence of their senses, they will take a scene for a chamber, which is ornamented in a stile altogether different? And how does what in the first description is a public place become afterwards a hall of audience? This decoration is either conversant with legerdemain, or it has a bad memory,

With all these endeavours, the scene where every thing takes place, is often so vaguely and contradictorily defined, that as a German writer * has well said, in many pieces we ought to insert under the list of the *dramatis personæ*: *The scene is on the theatre.*

These inconveniences arise almost inevitably from an anxious observance of the Greek rules, under a total change of circumstances. To avoid the supposed improbability of springing from one time and one place to another, they have often involved themselves in real and important improbabilities. A thousand times we have reason for repeating the observation of the Academy, in their criticism on the *Cid*, respecting the crowding together so many events in the period of twenty four hours: "From the fear of sinning against the rules of art, the poet has rather chosen to sin against the rules of nature." But this imaginary contradiction between art and nature could only suggest itself to minds possessed of the lowest and most limited ideas with respect to art.

I come now to a more important point, namely, to that of the materials not being handled in a manner suitable to their nature and quality. The Greek tragedians, with a few exceptions, always selected objects from their native mythology. The French tragedians borrow theirs sometimes from the ancient mythology, but much more frequently from the

* Joh. Elias Schlegel, in his *Gedanken zur Aufnahme des Dänischen Theaters*.

history of almost all ages and nations, and their manner of treating mythological and historical subjects is but too often not properly mythological, and not properly historical. I shall explain myself more distinctly. The poet who selects an ancient mythological fable, that is, a fable connected by sacred tradition with the religious belief of the Greeks, should enter himself, and in like manner enable his spectators to enter, into the spirit of antiquity; he should preserve the simple manners of the heroic ages, with which such violent passions and actions could alone be consistent or credible; his persons should bear that near resemblance to the gods which from their descent, and the frequency of their immediate intercourse with them, the ancients believed them to possess; what is wonderful in the Grecian religion should not be purposely avoided or under-stated, but placed in its true character before the imaginations of the spectators, who ought to be supposed capable of entering fully into the belief of it. Instead of this however the French poets have given to their mythological heroes and heroines the refinement of the fashionable world, and the court manners of the present day; they have, because those heroes were princes (shepherds of the people, Homer calls them), given such descriptions of their situations and views as could only correspond with the calculating policy of a different age, and not merely set antiquarian learning at defiance, but also violated every thing like characteristic costume. In *Phædra*, this princess is to be declared regent for her son till he come of

age, after the supposed death of Theseus. How could this be compatible with the relations of the Grecian women of that day? It brings us down to the times of a Cleopatra. Hermione remains alone, without the protection of a brother or a father, at the court of Pyrrhus, nay even in his palace, and yet she is not married to him. With the ancients, and not merely in the Homeric age, marriage consisted in receiving the bride into the house of the bridegroom. But whatever justification there may be for the situation of Hermione in the practice of European courts, it is not the less repugnant to every thing like female dignity, and the more indecorous, as Hermione is in love with the unwilling Pyrrhus, and urges the marriage in every possible way. What do we think the Greeks would have thought of this bold and indecent measure? No doubt it might appear equally offensive to French spectators, if Andromache were exhibited to them in the situation in which she appears in Euripides, where, as a captive, her person is enjoyed by the conqueror of her country. But when the way of thinking of two nations are so totally different, why will they torment themselves with attempts to fashion a subject founded on the manners of the one, to suit the manners of the other? What is allowed to remain will always exhibit a striking incongruity with that which is new modelled, and to change the whole is either impossible, or in no wise preferable to a new invention. The Grecian tragedians certainly allowed themselves a great latitude in changing the circumstances of the fables,

but the alterations were always consistent with the general ideas of the heroic age. On the other hand they always left the characters as they received them from tradition and early fable, by means of which the cunning of Ulysses, the wisdom of Nestor, and the impetuous rage of Achilles, had almost become proverbial. Horace particularly insists on the rule. But how unlike the Achilles in Racine's *Iphigenia* to the Achilles of Homer! The gallantry ascribed to him is not merely a sin against Homer, but it renders the whole story improbable. Are human sacrifices conceivable among a people whose chiefs and heroes are so susceptible of the most tender feelings? In vain recourse is had to the power of religious motives; history teaches us that a cruel religion becomes always milder with the manners of a people.

In these new exhibitions of ancient fables, the wonderful has been studiously rejected as foreign to our belief. But when we are once brought from a world in which it belonged to the order of things into a world entirely prosaical, and consistent with historical ideas, we then find any wonderful thing, which the poet can only exhibit in an insulated state, so much the more incredible. In Homer, and in the Greek tragedians, every thing takes place in the presence of the gods, and when they are visible, or display themselves in any wonderful manner, we are in no manner astonished. On the other hand, all the labour and art of the modern poets, all the eloquence of their narratives, cannot reconcile our minds to these exhibitions. Examples are superfluous, the thing is

so universally known. Yet I cannot help cursorily remarking how singularly Racine, cautious as he generally is, has on an occasion of this kind involved himself in an inconsistency. Respecting the origin of the fable of Theseus descending into the world below to carry off Proserpine for his friend Pirithöus, he adopts the historical explanation of Plutarch, that he was the prisoner of a Thracian king, whose wife he endeavoured to carry off from the same motive. On this he grounds the report of the death of Theseus, which was at first current. And yet he allows Phædra,* in a speech, to mention the fabulous tradition as an earlier achievement of the hero. How many women then did Theseus wish to carry off for Pirithöus? Pradon manages this much better: when Theseus is asked by a confident if he really was in the world below, he answers, how could any sensible man possibly believe such a silly tale! he merely availed himself of the credulity of the people, and gave out this report from political motives.

So much with respect to the manner of handling mythological materials. The same objection is in the first place applicable in the case of the historical, namely, that the French manners of the day are substituted to those which properly belong to the different persons, and that the characters do not sufficiently* bear the stamp of their age and their nation. But to this we must add another detri-

* Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,
Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,
Qui va du dieu des morts deshonoré la couche.

mental circumstance. A mythological subject is in its nature poetical, and ready for a new poetical attempt. In the French tragedy as in the Greek, an equal and constant dignity is required, and the French language is even much more fastidious in this respect, as very many things cannot be at all mentioned in poetry. But in history we are in a prosaical province, and the truth of the picture requires definitions, circumstances, and features, which cannot be given without a greater or less descent from the elevation of the tragical cothurnus. This has been done by Shakspeare the most perfect of all historical dramatists. The French tragedians however have not been able to bring their minds to submit to this, and hence their works are frequently deficient in those circumstances which give life and truth to a picture, and when an obstinate prosaical circumstance must at last be mentioned, they avail themselves of laboured and artificial circumlocutions.

Respecting the tragical dignity of historical subjects, peculiar principles have prevailed. Corneille was in the best way of the world when he brought his *Cid* on the stage, a story of the middle ages, which belonged to a kindred people, a story characterised by chivalrous love and honour, and in which the principal characters are not even of princely rank. Had this example been followed, a number of prejudices respecting tragical ceremony would of themselves have disappeared; tragedy, from its greater truth, from deriving its motives from a way of thinking still current and intelligible,

would have been less foreign to the heart; the quality of the objects would of themselves have turned them from the stiff observation of the rules of the ancients, which they did not understand, as we see, for instance, that Corneille never deviated so far from these rules, as in this very piece, in the train, it is true, of his Spanish model; in one word, the French tragedy would have become national and truly romantic. But I know not what unfortunate star had the ascendant: notwithstanding the extraordinary success of his *Cid*, Corneille did not go one step farther, and the attempt which he made had no imitators. In the time of Louis XIV. it was considered as a matter established beyond dispute, that the French, and in general the modern European history was not adapted for tragedy. They had recourse therefore to the ancient universal history: besides the Romans and Grecians, they frequently hunted about among the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Egyptians, for events, which, however obscure they might often be, they could dress out for the tragic stage. Racine made, according to his own confession, a hazardous attempt with the Turks; it was successful, and since that time, the necessary tragical dignity has been allowed to this barbarous people, with whom we often find the customs and habits of the rudest despotism, and the most abject slavery, united in the same person, and who know nothing of love, but the most luxurious sensuality; while it has been refused to the Europeans, notwithstanding their religion, their feeling of honour, and their respect

for the female sex, plead so powerfully in their favour. But it was merely the modern, and more particularly the French names, which could not be tolerated as untragical and unpoetical; for the heroes of antiquity are with them Frenchmen in every thing but the name; and antiquity was merely used as a thin veil under which the modern French character could be distinctly recognised. Racine's Alexander is certainly not the Alexander of history; but if under this name we imagine to ourselves the great Condé, the whole will appear tolerably natural. And who does not suppose Louis XIV. and the Duchess de la Valiere represented under Titus and Berenice? Did the poet wish to flatter his monarch by the allusion? Voltaire expresses himself somewhat strongly, when he says that in the tragedies which succeeded those of Racine, we imagine we are reading the romances of Mademoiselle Scuderi, which paint citizens of Paris under the names of heroes of antiquity. He alluded here more particularly to Crebillon. However much Corneille and Racine were tainted with the way of thinking of their own nation, they were still at times penetrated with the spirit of true objective exhibition. Corneille gives us a masterly picture of the Spaniards in the *Cid*; and this is conceivable enough, for he drew his materials from them. With the exception of the original sin of gallantry, he succeeded also pretty well with the Romans: of one part of their character at least he had a tolerable conception, their predominating patriotism, and unyielding pride of liberty, and the magnani-

imity of their political sentiments. All this, it is true, is nearly the same as we find it in Lucan, varnished over with a certain inflation and self-conscious pomp. The simple republican austerity, the humility of religion, he could not attain. Racine has admirably painted the corrupt manners of the Romans under the Emperors, and the timid and dastardly manner in which the tyranny of Nero first began to display itself. It is true he had Tacitus for a predecessor, as he himself gratefully acknowledges ; but still it is a great merit to translate history in such an able manner into poetry. He has also shown a just conception of the general spirit of Hebrew history : here he was guided by religious reverence, which the poet ought always in some degree to bring with him to his subject. He was less successful with the Turks : Bajazet makes love wholly in the European manner ; the blood thirsty policy of eastern despotism is very well portrayed, it is true, in the Vizier : but the whole resembles Turkey upside down, where the women, instead of being slaves, have contrived to get possession of the government, which wears such a revolting appearance, that we might well be inclined to infer from it, the Turks are really not so much to blame in keeping their women under lock and key. Neither has Voltaire, in my opinion, succeeded much better in his *Mahomet* and *Zaire* : the glowing colours of an oriental fancy are nowhere to be found. Voltaire has however this great merit, that he insisted on treating subjects with more historical truth, and that he made this the object of

his own endeavours ; and farther, that he again elevated to the dignity of the tragical stage the chivalrous and Christian characters of modern Europe, which since the time of the *Cid* had been altogether excluded from it. His *Lusignan and Nerestan* are among his most true, affecting, and noble creations ; his *Tancred*, although the invention as a whole is defective in strength, will always personally gain over every heart, like his namesake in Tasso.—*Alzire* is highly distinguished in a historical point of view. It is singular enough that Voltaire, with his restless search after tragical materials, has actually completed the circumnavigation of the world : for as in *Alzire* he exhibits the American tribes of the other hemisphere, in his *Dschingiskan* he brings Chinese on the stage, from the farthest extremity of ours, who, from the faithful observation of their costume, have the appearance of comic or grotesque figures.

Unfortunately Voltaire came too late with his projected reformation of the theatre : much was already ruined by the trammels within which French tragedy had been so long confined ; and the prejudice which gave such disproportionate importance to the observation of external rules and proprieties had, as it appears, been then irrevocably established.

Next to the rules respecting the external mechanism, which they had adopted without examination from the ancients, the prevailing ideas of social propriety peculiar to their nation were the principal obstacles to the French poets in the exercise of their talents, and in many cases put it altogether

out of their power to reach the highest tragical effect. The problem for the solution of the dramatic poet is the union of the poetical form with nature and truth, and consequently nothing ought to be included in the former, which the latter rejects. French tragedy, since the time of Richelieu, had developed itself under the favour and protection of the court; and even its scene had, as we have already observed, the appearance of an anti-chamber. In such an atmosphere the spectators might suggest the idea to the poet, that politeness was one of the original and essential ingredients of human nature. In tragedy, men are opposed to each other in the most dreadful strife, and in a close struggle with misfortune; we can only exact an ideal dignity from them, for from the nice observance of social punctilios they are absolved by their situation. So long as they still possess sufficient presence of mind not to violate them, so long as they do not appear completely overpowered by their grief and their mental agony, the highest degree of emotion cannot be reached. The poet may indeed be allowed to entertain that care for his persons which Cæsar had for himself after receiving the deadly blow, namely, to make them fall with decorum. He must not exhibit human nature to us in all its repulsive nakedness. The most heart-rending and dreadful pictures must still be possessed of beauty, must be somewhat more dignified than common reality. This miracle is effected by poetry: it has indiscrible sighs, immediate sounds of the deepest pain, in which there is still something melodious. It is

only a certain full-dressed and formal beauty, which is incompatible with the greatest truth of expression. And this beauty is exactly that which is demanded in the style of a French tragedy. No doubt there is something too in the quality of their language and their versification. The French language is altogether incapable of many bold flights, it has very little poetical freedom, and it carries into poetry all the grammatical stiffness of prose. Their poets have often acknowledged and lamented this. Besides, the Alexandrine with its couplets, with its hemistichs of equal length, is a very symmetrical and monotonous species of verse, and much better adapted for the expression of antithetical maxims, than for the musical delineation of passion with its unequal, abrupt, and erratic course. But the main cause lies in a national feature, in the social endeavour never to forget themselves in presence of others, and always to exhibit themselves to the greatest possible advantage. It has been often remarked, that in French tragedy the poet is always too easily seen through the discourses of the different personages, that he communicates to them his presence of mind, his cool reflexion on their situation, and his desire to shine upon all occasions. When we accurately examine the most of their tragical speeches, we shall find that they are seldom such as would be delivered by persons speaking or acting by themselves without any restraint; we shall generally discover something in them which betrays a reference more or less perceptible to the spectator. Before however our compassion can be powerfully

excited, we must be familiar with the characters; but how is this possible, if we are always to see them yoked to their views and endeavours, or, what is worse, to an unnatural and assumed grandeur of character? We must overhear them in their unguarded moments, when they imagine themselves alone, and throw aside all care and precaution.

Eloquence may and ought to have a place in tragedy, but in so far as it appears with somewhat of an artificial method and preparation, it can only be in character when the speaker is sufficiently master of himself; for overpowering passion, an unconscious and involuntary eloquence is alone suitable. The truly inspired orator will forget himself in the object which occupies him. We call it rhetoric when he thinks more of himself, and the art in which he flatters himself he has obtained a mastery, than of his subject. Rhetoric, and rhetoric in a court dress, prevails but too much in many French tragedies, especially in those of Corneille, instead of the suggestions of a noble, but simple and artless nature; Racine and Voltaire however have approximated much nearer to the true conception of a mind carried away by its sufferings. Whenever the tragic hero is able to express his pain in antitheses and ingenious allusions, we may safely dispense with our pity. This sort of conventional dignity is, as it were, a coat of mail, to prevent the blow from reaching the inward parts. On account of their retaining this festal pomp in situations where the most complete self-forgetfulness would be natural, Schiller has wittily enough compared the heroes

in French tragedy to the kings in old copper-plates, who lie in bed with mantle, crown, and sceptre.

The social cultivation prevails throughout the whole of the French literature and art. Social cultivation sharpens the sense for the ludicrous, and on that account, when it is carried to an over refinement, it is the death of every thing like enthusiasm. For all enthusiasm, all poetry, has a ludicrous aspect for the unfeeling. When therefore such a way of thinking has once become universal in a nation, a certain negative criticism will also arise. A thousand different things must be avoided, and in attending to these, the highest object of all is lost sight of, that which ought properly to be performed. The dread of the ludicrous is the conscience of French poets; it has clipped their wings, and impaired their flight. It is exactly in the most serious kind of poetry that this dread must torment them the most; for extremes run into one another, and whenever pathos fails it gives rise to laughter and parody. It is amusing to witness the infinite distress of mind of Voltaire, when he was threatened with a parody of his *Semiramis* on the Italian theatre. In a petition to the Queen, this man, whose whole life had been passed in turning every thing great and honourable into ridicule, endeavours to avail himself of his claim, as one of the servants of the King's household, to obtain a prohibition of a very allowable amusement of a higher description. As the French wits have indulged themselves in turning every thing in the world into ridicule, and more especially the mental

productions of other nations, they will also allow us on our parts to divest ourselves, when we see that their tragic writers, with all their care, have now and then been unable to escape the rock of which they were most in dread. Lessing has, with the most irresistible and victorious wit, pointed out the ludicrous nature of the very plans of *Rodogune*, *Semiramis*, *Merope*, and *Zaire*. But both in this respect and with regard to single laughable turns, a rich gleanings might yet be obtained.* But Lessing

* A few examples of the latter kind may be sufficient. The lines with which Theseus in the *Œdipus* of Corneille opens his part, are deserving of one of the first places :

Quelque ravage affreux qu'étaie ici la peste
L'absence aux vrais amans est encore plus funeste.

The following from his *Otho* are equally well known :

Dis moi done, lorsqu' Othon s'est offert à Camille,
A-t-il paru contraint ? a-t-elle été facile ?
Son hommage auprès d'elle a-t-il eu plein effet ?
Comment l'a-t-elle pris, et comment l'a-t-il fait ?

Where it is almost unconceivable, that the poet should not have seen the application which might be made of the passage, especially as he allows the confidant to answer : *J'ai tout vu*. That *Attila* should treat the kings who are dependent on him like good for nothing fellows :

Ils ne sont pas venus, nos deux rois ; qu' on leur die
Qu'ils se font trop attendre, et qu' Attila s'ennuie
Qu' alors que je les mande ils doivent se hâter :

may in one view appear very serious and true, but nevertheless it appears exceedingly droll to us from the turn of expression,

carried on a much more merciless war against the French stage than we should be perhaps justified in doing in the present day. At the time when he

and especially from its being the opening of the piece. Generally speaking, with respect to the ludicrous, Corneille lived in a state of great innocence; the world since that time has become a great deal more witty. Hence when we make allowances for what he cannot be blamed for, as it merely arises from his language having become obsolete, we shall still find an ample field remaining for our ridicule. In the numerous pieces which are not reckoned among his master-pieces, we have only to turn them up at random to light upon passages susceptible of a ludicrous application. Racine, from the refinement and moderation which were natural to him, was much more secure from this danger; but yet, here and there, many expressions of the same description have escaped from him. We may here include the whole of the speech where Theramenes exhorts his pupil Hippolytus to yield himself up to love. The ludicrous can hardly be carried farther than in these lines :

Craint-on de s'égarer sur les traces d' Hercule ?
 Quels courages Venus n'a-t-elle pas domtés ?
 Vous même, où seriez vous, vous qui la combattez,
 Si toujours Antiope, à ses loix opposée,
 D' une pudique ardeur n'eût brûlé pour Thesée ?

In *Berenice* Antiochus receives his confident, whom he had sent to announce his visit to the Queen, with the words: *Ar-sace, entrerons-nous ?* This humble patience in an ante-chamber would appear even undignified in comedy, but it appears too pitiful even for a second rate tragical hero. Antiochus says afterwards to the queen :

Je me suis tû cinq ans
 Madame, et vais encore me taire plus long-tems—

And to give an immediate proof of his intention by his conduct, he repeats after this no less than fifty verses in a breath.

published his *Dramaturgie*, we had scarcely any but French tragedies upon our stages, and the extravagant predilection for them as classical models had not then been combated. At present the national taste has been declared so decidedly against them, that we have nothing to fear from any illusion from that quarter.

It is farther said that the French dramatists have to do with a public not only extremely fastidious with respect to the introduction of any thing low, and extremely susceptible of the ludicrous, but also extremely impatient. We shall allow them all the credit of this self flattery; for we can have no doubt that their meaning is, that this impatience is a proof of quick apprehension and sharpness of wit. It is susceptible however of another interpretation: superficial knowledge, and more especially an inward

When Orosman says to *Zaire*, whom he pretends to love with European tenderness;

Je sais que notre loi, favorable aux plaisirs
Ouvre un champ sans limite a nos vastes desirs ;

his language is still more indecorous than laughable. But the answer of *Zaire* to her confident, who on this puts her in mind that she is a Christian, is highly comic :

Ah ! que dis-tu ? pourquoi rappeler mes ennuis ?

Upon the whole however Voltaire is much more upon his guard against the ludicrous than his predecessors: this was perfectly natural, for in his time the rage of turning every thing into ridicule was most prevalent. We may boldly affirm that in our days a single verse of the description of hundreds in Corneille would infallibly occasion the death of a piece.

emptiness of mind, always display themselves in a fretful impatience. But however this may be, the disposition in question has had both an advantageous and a disadvantageous influence on the structure of their pieces. It has been advantageous in so far as it has compelled them to lop off every thing superfluous, to proceed to the main business without circumlocution, to be perspicuous, to study compression, to endeavour to turn every moment to account. All these are good theatrical properties, and have been the means of recommending the French tragedies as models of perfection to those who rather examine works of art by the dry test of the understanding, than listen to the voice of imagination and feeling. It has been disadvantageous in so far as even motion, rapidity, and stretch of expectation, continued without interruption, become at length wearisome and monotonous. It is like a music from which the *piano* should be altogether excluded, and in which even the difference between *forte* and *fortissimo* should not be distinguishable from the mistaken emulation of the performers. I find too few resting places in their tragedies, such as we have every where in the ancient tragedies where the lyric enters. There are moments in human life which are dedicated by every religious mind to self-meditation, and when the view is turned towards the past and the future. This sacredness of the moment I do not find to be held in sufficient reverence: the actors as well as the spectators are always equally hurried on to what follows; and we shall find very few scenes indeed,

where the developement of a mere condition is tranquilly represented independently of the causal connexion. The question with them is always *what* happens, and not sufficiently *how* it happens. And yet this is the main thing when an impression is to be made on the witnesses of human events. Hence every thing like silent effect is almost entirely excluded from the province of their dramatic art. The only leisure which remains to the actor for silent pantomime is during the delivery of the long discourses addressed to him, when it more frequently serves to embarrass him, than to assist him in the developement of his part. They are satisfied if the weaving of the intrigue proceeds in its rapid measure without interruption, and if in the speeches and answers the ball is diligently kept up to the conclusion.

Generally speaking, impatience is by no means a good disposition for the reception of the beautiful. Even dramatic poetry, the most animated production of art, has its contemplative side, and where this is neglected, the representation then engenders, from its very rapidity and animation, only a deafening noise in our mind, instead of the inward music which ought to accompany it.

Many technical imperfections in their tragedy have been admitted by the French critics themselves; for instance, the confidants. Every hero and heroine regularly drag a person along with them, a gentleman in waiting or a court lady. In not a few pieces, we may count three or four of these merely passive hearers, who sometimes open their

lips to tell something to their patron which he must have known better himself, or who are dispatched on messages. The confidants in the Greek tragedies, either old tutors and governesses, or servants, have always peculiar characteristical destinations, and the ancient tragedians felt so little the want of communications between a hero and his confidant, in making us acquainted with the state of mind and views of the former, that they even introduce so important a friend as Pylades, whose fame has become proverbial, as a mute personage. But whatever ridicule has been cast on the confidants, and however great the reproach of being reduced to make use of them, down to the time of Alfieri no attempt was ever made to get quit of them.

The expositions or statements of the preliminary situation of things are another nuisance. They generally consist of disclosures to the confidants, delivered in choice language, when they have abundance of leisure on their hands. That very public whose impatience keeps the poets and players under such strict discipline, possesses patience enough, however, to listen to the unfolding in wordy treatises of what ought to be developed before their eyes. It is allowed that an exposition is seldom unexceptionable; that the persons in their speeches begin farther back than they naturally ought, and that they tell one another what they must both have known before, &c. If the affair is complicated, these expositions are generally extremely tedious: those of *Heraclius* and *Rodogune* absolutely make the head

giddy. Chaulieu says of Crebillon's *Rhadamiste*, "The piece would be perfectly clear were it not for the exposition." It seems to me that their whole system of expositions, both in tragedy and in high comedy, is exceedingly defective. Nothing can be more ill judged than to begin at once to instruct us without any dramatic movement. At the drawing up of the curtain the attention of the spectator is almost inevitably distracted by external circumstances, his interest has not yet been excited; and this is precisely the time chosen by the poet to exact from him an earnest and undivided attention to a dry investigation, a demand which he can hardly be supposed willing to admit. It will perhaps be argued that the very same thing was done by the Greek poets. But the subject was for the most part extremely simple with them, and it was already known to the spectators; and their expositions, with the exception of the unskilful prologues of Euripides, have not the didactic and inculcatory tone of the French, but display life and motion. How admirable again are the expositions of Shakespeare and Calderon! They lay hold of the imagination at the very outset; and when they have once gained over the spectator, they then bring forward the information necessary for the full understanding of the subsequent transactions. This means is, it is true, denied to the French tragic poets, who are very sparingly allowed the use of any thing calculated to make an impression on the senses, any thing like corporeal action, and who are obliged

to reserve the little which is within their power to the last acts, that they may still in some degree heighten the interest of them.

To comprise what I have hitherto observed in a few words: the French have endeavoured to form their tragedy according to a strict idea; but instead of this they have merely hit upon an abstract notion. They require tragical dignity and grandeur, tragical situations, passions, and pathos, altogether naked and pure without any foreign appendages. From stripping them in this way of their accompaniments they lose much in truth, profundity, and character; and the whole composition is deprived of the living charm of variety, the magic of picturesque situations, and of all those overpowering effects which can only be produced by the increase of objects under a voluntary abandonment after easy and gradual preparation. With respect to the theory of the tragic art, they are yet nearly at the point in which they were in gardening in the time of Lenotre. The whole merit consists in extorting a triumph from nature by means of art. They have no other idea of regularity than the measured symmetry of straight alleys, clipped hedges, &c. In vain should we labour to make those who lay out such gardens comprehend that there can be any plan, any concealed order in an English park, and demonstrate to them that a succession of landscapes, which from their gradation, their alternation, and their opposition, give effect to each other, all aim at exciting in us a certain disposition of mind.

The rooted and permanent prejudices of a whole

nation are seldom accidental, but are connected with a general want of solid knowledge, from which the distinguished minds who lead the rest are not excepted. We are not therefore to consider such prejudices merely as causes ; we must consider them also at the same time as important effects. We allow that the narrow system of rules, that the dissecting intellectual criticism, has shackled the French tragedians ; still, however, it remains doubtful whether their own inclinations would have led them to make choice of more comprehensive designs, and whether they could have filled them up. The most distinguished among them have certainly not been deficient in means and talents. In a particular examination of their different productions we cannot show them any favour ; but, on a general view, they are more deserving of pity than censure ; and when, under such unfavourable circumstances, they have still been able to produce what is excellent, they are doubly entitled to our admiration, although we can by no means admit the justice of the common place observation, that the overcoming of difficulty is a source of pleasure, nor find any thing meritorious in a work of art merely because it is artfully composed.

I have already briefly noticed all that it was necessary to mention of the antiquities of the French stage. The duties of the poet were gradually defined with greater strictness from a belief in the authority of the ancients, and the infallibility of Aristotle. The poets were from their own inclination however led to the Spanish theatres, so long as

the dramatic art in France had not attained its full maturity by a native education. They not only imitated the Spaniards, but even borrowed directly from this mine of ingenious invention. I do not merely allude to the earlier time under Richelieu; this state of things continued throughout the whole of the first half of the age of Louis XIV.; and Racine is perhaps the oldest poet who seems to have been altogether unacquainted with the Spaniards, or at least who was in no manner influenced by them. The comedies of Corneille are nearly all of them taken from Spanish pieces; and of his celebrated works the *Cid* and *Don Sancho of Aragon* are also Spanish. The only piece of *Rotrou* which still keeps its place on the theatre, *Wenceslas*, is from Francisco de Roxas: the unfinished *Princess of Elis* of Molière is from Moreto, *Don Garcia of Navarre* from an unknown author, and the *Festin de Pierre* carries its origin in its front:* we have only to look at the works of *Thomas Corneille* to be at once convinced that with the exception of a few they are all Spanish; and so are the earlier labours of *Quinault*, namely, his comedies and tragi-comedies. The right of drawing without scruple from this source was so universal, that the French imitators, when they borrowed without the least disguise, did not even give themselves the trouble of naming

* And betrays at the same time Molière's ignorance of the Spanish. For if he had possessed even a tolerable knowledge, how could he have translated *El Convidado de Piedra* (the Stone Guest) into the *Stone Feast*, which has no meaning here, and could only be applicable to the Feasts of Midas?

the author of the original, and assigning a part of the applause which they might earn to the true owner. In the *Cid* alone the text of the Spanish poet has frequently been cited, because the claim of Corneille to originality was called in question.

We should certainly derive much instruction from an inquiry into the models when they are not among the more celebrated, or when their titles are not known, and instituting a comparison between them and the copies. We must, however, go very differently to work from Voltaire in *Heraclius*, where *Garcia de la Huerta** has uncontestably proved both his great ignorance, and his studied and disgusting perversions. If the most of these imitations give little pleasure in France in the present day, this decides nothing against the originals, which must always have suffered considerably from the change. The national characters of the French and Spanish are totally different; and consequently the spirit of their language and poetry must be equally distinct. The most empty and confined character belongs to the French; the Spanish, though in the remotest west, displays an oriental vein which may easily be accounted for from its history; it luxuriates in a profusion of bold images and sallies of wit. When we deprive their dramas of these sumptuous ornaments, when, for the glowing colours of their romances and the musical variations of the rhymed strophes in which they are composed, we compel them to assume the monotony

See

* In the introduction to his *Theatro Hespañol*.

of the Alexandrine with the addition of external regularities, while the character and situations are allowed to remain essentially the same, there can no longer be any harmony between the subject and the manner in which it is treated, and it will have forfeited that truth which may still be exhibited in the dominion of fancy.

The charm of the Spanish poetry consists, generally speaking, in the union of sublime and enthusiastic seriousness of feeling, which peculiarly descends from the North, with the lovely breath of the South, and the dazzling pomp of the East. *Corneille* possessed an affinity to the Spanish spirit, but only in the first point; we might take him for a Spaniard, educated in Normandy. It is to be regretted that, instead of depending on foreign models, he had not, after the *Cid*, employed himself upon subjects where he might have given himself altogether up to his feeling for chivalrous honour and fidelity. But he had recourse to the Roman history; and the severe patriotism of the older Romans, with the ambitious policy of those of an after period, supplied the place of chivalry, and in some measure assumed its garb. It was by no means so much his object to excite our terror and compassion as our admiration for the characters, and astonishment at the situations, of his heroes. He hardly ever affects us; and is seldom capable of producing agitation.— Here I might indeed observe, that such is his partiality for admiration, that not contented with exacting it for the heroism of virtue, he claims it also for the heroism of vice, from the boldness, strength

of soul, presence of mind, and elevation above all human failings, which he exhibits in his criminals of both sexes. Nay, it often happens that his characters express themselves in the language of ostentatious pride, without our being well able to see of what they have to be proud : they are merely proud of their pride. We cannot often say that we take an interest in them : they either appear to stand in no need of our compassion from the great resources which they possess within themselves, or they are undeserving of it. He has represented the conflict of passions and motives ; but for the most part not immediately as such, but already metamorphosed into a contest of principles. He has been found coldest in love ; and this was because he could not prevail on himself to paint it as an amiable weakness, although he every where introduced it, even where it was very unsuitable, either from a condescension for the taste of the age or a private inclination for chivalry, where love always appears as the ornament of valour, as the checkered favour waving at the lance, as the elegant ribbon-knot to the sword. He seldom paints love as a power which imperceptibly steals upon us, and at last gains an involuntary and irresistible dominion over us ; but as an homage freely chosen to the exclusion of duty at first, but afterwards maintaining its place along with it. This is the case at least in his better pieces ; for in his later works love is frequently compelled to give way to ambition ; and these two springs mutually weaken each other. His females are generally not sufficiently feminine ; and the love

which they inspire is with them not the last object, but merely a means. They stimulate their lovers to great dangers, and sometimes also to great crimes; and the men appear often to suffer from allowing themselves to be mere instruments in the hands of women, and to be dispatched on heroic messages as it were by the women, for the sake of winning the prize of love previously held out to them. Such women as Emilia in *Cinna and Rodogune* must be unsusceptible of love. But if Corneille has departed from truth in his principal characters by exaggerating the energetical and under-rating the passive part of our nature, if his heroes display too much volition and too little feeling, he is still much more unnatural in his situations. He has, in defiance of all probability, pointed them in such a way, that we might properly give them the appellation of tragical antitheses; so that the expression of a series of epigrammatical maxims may be said to be natural in them. He is fond of exhibiting the most symmetrical oppositions. His eloquence is often admirable from its strength and compression; but it sometimes degenerates into bombast, and exhausts itself in superfluous accumulations. The later Romans, Seneca the philosopher, and Lucan, were too much considered by him in the light of models; and unfortunately he also possessed a vein of Seneca the tragedian. From this wearisome pomp of declamation, a few simple words here and there interspersed have been often made the subject of extravagant praise.* If they stood alone they would

* For instance, the *Qu'il mourût* of the old Horatius; the

certainly be entitled to praise ; but they are immediately followed by long speeches which soon destroy their effect. When the Spartan mother, on delivering the shield to her son, used the well known words, ' This, or on this ! ' she certainly made no farther addition to them. Corneille was peculiarly well qualified for exhibiting ambition and the lust of power, a passion which stifles all other human feelings, and never properly erects its throne till the mind has previously become a cold and dreary wilderness. His youth was passed in the last civil wars, and he still saw remains of the feudal independence. I will not pretend to decide how much this may have influenced him, but it is undeniable that the sense which he often showed of the great importance of political questions, was altogether unknown to the following age, and first made its appearance again in Voltaire. He paid however his tribute of flattery to Louis the Fourteenth, like the rest of the poets of his time, in verses which are now forgotten.

Racine, who has not yet during a whole century been decidedly declared the favourite poet of the French nation, was by no means during his life in so enviable a situation, and, notwithstanding many proofs of brilliant success, could not then repose in the pleasing and undisturbed possession of his fame. His merits in giving the last polish to the French language, his unrivalled excellencies of expression and versification, were not then allowed ; on the

Soyons amis, Cinna ; also the *Mn* of *Medea* which, we may observe in passing, is borrowed from Seneca.

stage he had rivals who partly obtained an undeserved preference over him. On the one hand, the exclusive admirers of Corneille, with Madam Sevigné at their head, made a formal party against him; on the other hand, Pradon, who was a much younger man than himself, endeavoured to obtain the victory over him, and he actually succeeded, it would appear, not merely in gaining over the crowd, but the very court itself, notwithstanding the zeal with which he was opposed by Boileau. The chagrin to which this gave rise unfortunately interrupted his theatrical career, at the very period when his mind had attained its full maturity; he was afterwards prevented by a mistaken piety from returning to his theatrical employment, and it required all the influence of Madame Maintenon to induce him to employ himself upon religious subjects for a particular occasion. It is probable that he would have still carried the art a great deal higher, for in the works which we have we uniformly perceive a successive improvement. He is a poet in every respect deserving of our love: he possessed a great susceptibility for all the more tender emotions, and great sweetness in the manner of expressing them. His moderation, which never allowed him to transgress the bounds of propriety, we will not estimate too highly, for he did not possess any superfluity of strength of character, nay, there are even marks of weakness perceptible in him, which it is said he also exhibited in his private life. He has also paid his homage to the luscious gallantry of his age, where it merely serves as a show of love to connect together the intrigue; but he has

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ten also completely succeeded in the delineation of a more genuine love, especially in his female characters ; and many of his amatory scenes breathe a tender voluptuousness, which, from the veil of reserve and modesty thrown over it, steals only the more seductively into the soul. The inconsistencies of unsuccessful passion, the wanderings of a distempered mind in prey to an irresistible desire, he has portrayed with more emotion and fervour than any French poet before him, or even perhaps after him. Generally speaking, he was more inclined to the elegiac and the idyllic, than to the heroic. I will not say that he would never have elevated himself to more serious and dignified conceptions as in *Britannicus* and *Mithridat* ; but here we must distinguish between what his subject suggested to him, and what he drew with peculiar fondness, where he is less to be considered as a dramatic artist than as speaking the language of his own feelings. However, it ought not to be forgotten that Racine composed the most of his pieces when he was very young, and that his choice may easily be supposed to have been influenced by that circumstance. He seldom disgusts us with the undisguised repulsiveness of unnecessary crimes, like Corneille and Voltaire ; he has often however concealed what in reality is hard, base, and low, under forms of politeness and courtesy. I cannot allow the designs of his pieces to be unexceptionable, as the French critics would have them ; those which he borrowed from the ancient mythology are, in my opinion, the most liable to objection : but I

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believe, with the rules and observations which I took for his guide, he could hardly in most cases have extricated himself from his difficulties more cautiously and properly than he has actually done. Whatever may be the defects of his productions separately considered, when we compare him with others, and view him in connexion with the French literature in general, we can hardly bestow upon him too high a praise.

END OF VOL. I.

